骸骨騎士様、只今異世界へお出掛け中 II

Skeleton Knight, going out to the parallel universe

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OVERLAP

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Illustration

Prologue

Author's Note: Thank you for waiting everyone.

* * *

Rhoden Kingdom took pride in being the third most powerful nation on the Northern continent.

The eastern and western Leburan empires touched the northern border, the shoreline connected to the Burugo Gulf in the west, the south lead to the sea and in the east was the Canada forest, which was independent from Rhoden and the home of the elves. In short, the country's location kept it relatively safe from foreign enemies.

The northern border was connected to both of the Leburan Empires.

The eastern Holy Leburan Empire and the western Great Leburan Empire used to be a single country before it split into two, and now the two are at each others throats, trying to grasp total power on the continent.

The two countries are almost equal in strength, so the struggle for supremacy will be decided by the country that manages to draw Rhoden Kingdom to its side, and because of this the conflict of east vs. west is casting its shadow upon the Rhoden Kingdom.

The eastern Holy Leburan Empire has tropic ports and vast plains in the south, and intends to offer them to Rhoden in exchange for overthrowing the west. While the more legitimate western Great Leburan Empire planned to use Rhoden to eliminate the east.

In addition to that, the struggle for the succession of Rhoden's throne has also intensified, with the western empire supporting first prince Sect and the eastern holy empire supporting second prince Douglass respectively.

The final faction involved in the bid for the throne was the second princess Juliana who has remained independent from other countries. Instead she has focused her attention to the west, beyond the archduchy of Rinburuto, and seeks to strengthen the bonds between the great Canadian forest and the elves that inhabit it.

The fierce power struggle between these people has split the kingdom's nobles, and since the shady source that funded the second prince's faction was shut down due to someone's machinations, the spheres of influence have greatly shifted in the kingdom.

North of the Calcutta mountain range, a fertile plain opened up, from the east side of the wind dragon mountain range the quantity of water in the Rydell river bolstered as it flowed past the capital into the southern sea.

In a certain room in the imperial palace in the capital city of Olav, a woman accompanied by her personal maid sat at a waist high table that overlooked the courtyard, together with two other people.

The woman who sat with ladylike conduct, dressed in neat clothes and surrounded by a calm atmosphere while still retaining the cuteness of a young girl, was the second princess of this country, Juliana Meroru Melissa Rhoden Olav.

She had long, dark blonde hair that fell down in loose waves, lovely brown eyes and white, regular features. However, deep within those eyes dwelled the light of a strong-willed individual.

“This time around, I heard that Douglass nii-san and Sect nii-san were interested in the Hoban territory. Officially they’re going to a ball, but in reality they’re just looking into territories around the capital.”

A man in the prime of his life nodded at princess Juliana’s words before chiming in.

This large man wore a General’s uniform, had brown hair that was cut very short and a square jaw that gave off a dignified impression.

This person was the duke that belonged to the princess’ faction, head of the Frivetran household and one of the country’s three generals, Carton De Frivetran.

“That inspection of Hoban reeks of danger. There’s still speculation flying around the court about the previous incident. Some even say that the elven surprise attack was a feint by the faction of his highness Sect, or our own.”

The previously mentioned incident was the assassination of a member of the second prince’s faction, Marquis Diento.

In the Rhoden kingdom, it was prohibited to capture and sell elves, but the former lord of Diento had been suspected of doing just that on the black market, and the affair happened just as princess Juliana had sent a scout to secretly investigate.

At first the witness testimony stated that elves were the ones behind it, but the witnesses suddenly disappeared, which lead to a number of speculations as to who the true culprit was. The purpose of the attack also remained unclear, which in turn lead to even more speculation.

“There is also the simultaneous attack on the slave traders, and how all of Marquis Diento’s savings disappeared on top of that. All the speculation just keeps piling up.”

Princess Juliana shrugged and sighed loudly.

“The whereabouts of the majority of it remains unknown, but a part of it seemed to have been found within the Diento territory. Pieces of expensive furniture were found in the possession of citizens. Everything that was recovered had been found on the open market. If the Diento family wants to recover everything, they’ll have to act quickly before the rest disappears into the darkness.”

The young man sitting next to the general opened his mouth.

He also wore a general's military uniform, though simplified, was well-mannered and looked strikingly similar to General Carton even though his features were more delicate than the general's. However, his tone was comparable to General Cartons.

His name was Lendl Do Frivetran. He was the battalion commander of a large military unit, heir of the Frivetran dukedom and General Carton's son.

"Whatever they do, it will take take some time before Marquis Diento's family recovers. With the loss of a major fanatical supporter, his highness Douglass is trying to quell the unrest in his faction… I've also heard that his highness Sect is making overtures toward Duke Brutus."

General Carton stroked his magnificent beard as anxiety over both camps' movements caused his eyebrows to rise and his wrinkles to be more prominent.

While nodding at the General's concerns, princess Juliana spoke of future correspondences.

"A storm is coming…… It may be better to move up our schedule and hasten our visit to Rinburuto. Helen asked to accompany us at that time."

Juliana straightened her back as she stood up and looked in the eyes of her personal maid and close childhood friend Feruna, while speaking of her future schedule.

The maid Feruna gave a little smile, sharpened her gaze, and lowered her head full of beautifully tied up hair.

“I understand, Juliana-sama.”

“……Alright. In about five days we will head towards Rinburuto, let’s also narrow the number of guards to fifty. We’ll leave Lendl in charge of selecting the guards, while I’ll select the subordinates we bring along.”

The general slapped his son on his shoulder, which broke the enthrallment he had been under after seeing the maid Feruna, causing him to quickly kneel on the spot and lower his head.

“Even if it cost me my life, I’ll definitely ensure that your highness has a safe journey!”

“Thank you lord Lendl. If that bishop of the Hiruku religion makes any suspicious moves, please be prepared to neutralize them.”

The two lowered their heads again at Juliana’s word.

Chapter 1:「Onward to Raratoia」Part 1

A group was moving through a forest filled with tall and thick-trunked trees, trying not to stumble on the roots covered with moss.

The sky in the east had already started to brighten and little patches of sunlight were seeping through the foliage.

I was carrying three sacks filled with gold coins over my shoulder, and a “clang clang” sound was mixed in with the whispers of the tree leaves.

We were in the center of Canada forest, the home of the elves.

In this world that I was dropped into, I was given the form of my game character, and as I went about in a dizzy I somehow wound up helping the elves in their mission.

Yet, I had not even an ounce of regret for my actions. It’s only natural for a Japanese person to want to help the disadvantaged elves and beastmen in this world.

Probably.

The elven woman walking in front of me was a rare dark elf. She had smooth lilac skin, long white hair, and her ears were shorter than those of normal elves. Her tall frame was wrapped in a leather corset over somber clothes and her limbs overflowed with enough sex appeal to attract the eyes of any man.

Her name was Ariane Glenys Maple. She was one of Maple’s warriors, which was the capital of Canada. A thin sword hung at her waist, and she also possessed strong spirit magic.

Her chest bounced up and down with every step, her buttocks bobbed with every movement, and I had a perfect view from behind… but all of a sudden she stopped and focused her brilliant golden eyes on me.

Somehow, she seemed to have noticed my stare——

Like I said, the body I got when I came to this world was the same one from the game I had been playing.

My whole body was covered in detailed, white, full-body armor that wouldn’t be unusual for a mythical knight to wear.

A pitch-black mantle fluttered in the wind and the inside of the mantle looked like a starry night sky.

On my back, I carried a large, heavily engraved round shield and a two-handed sword that emitted a divine aura.

However, inside this suit of armor was only the body of a skeleton.

Therefore, this body had no eyes. Only the pale blue light of the dead existed in my eye sockets.

For her to still be able to sense my stare, the senses of a woman were truly frightening.

While thinking about such things, the voice of two other women was heard from behind.

“I’ve used too much mana. I won’t be able to use spirit magic for a while, would you happen to have a weapon I could borrow?”

“I’m tired～. I need to take a rest somewhere……”

The two women were covered in a gray and black cloak respectively and were bringing up the rear. They had straight blonde hair with a greenish tint, and the characteristic long ears peeped out between the strands. One’s skin was opposite of the dark elf Ariane’s pale complexion, her name was Senna and she had an overall slender figure and sharp eyes.

The other one had a tender expression that Senna lacked and short cut hair. Her name was Oona.

A short while ago, both of these elven women had been the prisoners of Diento’s feudal lord. Because the two barely had any clothing on, Ariane and I had given them our cloaks so they could cover themselves.

We got a heap of gold coins from the castle of Diento’s lord, and I was carrying all three bags worth of it over my shoulder. Since I had my hands full, the two of them were on guard for the monsters that roamed the forest.

“We’ll reach the river Rydell soon. Once we reach the riverbank we’ll take a break. Afterwards, our destination will be only a little farther upstream.”

When Ariane turned around to inform us, I was able to see the tall cliff which overlooked the riverbed that I had passed by before.

As the wide river came into view, the tree line receded and the surroundings became brighter.

The daylight had was getting stronger, with the morning sun illuminating the forest, and the level of sunlight that penetrated the foliage was gradually increasing.

I lowered the sacks of gold coins on a suitable rock while the other three had found their own places to sit and rest.

It truly was a pleasant place.

The wind blow across the bank of the river and caused leaves to rustle. Mixed in were the cheeping of birds and the occasional cry of a monster; in this place, we calmly spent our time.

Ponta, who had been on my head until now, jumped down to get a drink of water before she soaked her forepaws in the water and started playing around.

Ponta was a fox-like animal that was about 60cm in length. Though she had the face of a fox, her tail made up half of her body and was the same shape of a cotton ball. However, the form of her legs gave her the impression of a giant flying squirrel. Her soft fur was light green on her back and pure white on her underbelly.

According to the elves, she was a rare animal called a spirit beast and was commonly called a fluffy fox. It was apparently rare for a spirit beast to take a liking to someone, though I seemed to have tamed Ponta smoothly by feeding her, even if that was questionable at best.

When I turned my attention upstream to the riverbank where Ponta was playing, I noticed some huge dragonflies nearby. They were almost two meters long and hovered above the water surface with their tails sticking into the water.

Occasionally, one of the huge dragonflies would raise their tail out of the water with a fish attached and skillfully hold the fish in the air as it began to feast upon it.

“Those are dragonfly. They won’t attack unless you approach them during the breeding season.”

When she noticed me staring, Ariane explained the nature of the huge dragonflies to me. They only attacked in the breeding season, but……

This thick forest seems to have a variety of monsters living in it. In fact, we frequently encountered monsters when we were making our way here.

The three of them repelled them without much difficulty, but Senna seems to have used a considerable amount of mana along the way.

“Senna, use my sword for now own. I still have enough mana left.”

Since Ariane noticed that Senna was running low on mana, she took the sword from her waist and handed it to her.

I was looking at this when I remembered something; I hauled one of the sacks filled with gold coins in front of me and rummaged through it. Buried between the gold coins was a single sword.

It was something I found when we infiltrated the feudal lord’s castle to save Senna and Oona. The sword was a masterpiece-grade item, the handle was garnished with the head of a lion that had deep red jewels in place of eyes. The eponymous『Sword of the Lion King』.

I completely forgot about it when I threw it into the sack.

“Ariane-dono, you could use this if you like.”

Since I was already completely equipped thanks to my knight role-play, I offered the sword to her. She widely opened her eyes when she received the sword.

“Is it okay? This is a very good sword.”

“Hun, I don’t mind. It was gathering dust in the lord’s castle. Besides, I already have this……”

Saying so, I held up my one meter long, two-handed greatsword. What I was showing her was the mythical grade weapon『Holy Thunder Sword』.

She looked surprised for a moment before she wordlessly unsheathed the sword in her hand to inspect the grip and blade, and once she was finished she nodded before sheathing it again.

“Thank you, Arc. This will be helpful.”

Her full lips lifted into a smile as she thanked me and put the sword on her waist.

“We’ll end our break soon and continue our trek upstream. Arc, can I ask you a favor?”

“Sure. You all should hold onto me while I carry the luggage and transfer us up the river.”

I said this while I was picking up the sacks filled with gold coins I had been sitting next to. Ponta seemed to have noticed what was happening since she used spirit magic to glide from the riverbed to her usual spot atop my helmet.

Confirming that everyone was holding on to me, I focused my attention upstream.

“【Dimensional Step】”

It was a support-magic skill that allowed me to perform short-range teleportation, and in an instant the entire scenery changed. I set the target a while ago, and we now stood at the upper reaches of the river.

“Hum, that’s a convenient spell～. Why didn’t you use this a while ago when we were in the forest? We could have gotten a lot farther by now～”

The short-haired elf Oona was muttering this while she was looking at our new surrounding.

The riverbank we had been resting on moments before was now a considerable distance downstream from our current position.

“The range is limited in areas like forests, where the visibility is lacking.”

While the magic was convenient for travel, it can only move to an area that you can visually perceive. The ground of the forest we had just been in was full of undergrowth, cliffs and marshes. One wrong step could have meant the end, so using the skill there was prohibited.

“Is that so… Still, it is really convenient～”

Oona contently gave that relaxed praise many times as I continued to transfer us upstream.

It didn't take that long before we arrived at a river fork.

Coming from the northern Wind Dragon Mountains, the river split into two at this location.

It appears that the river splitting off is called the Riburute river.

It was very wide, and judging by the color of the water it was quite deep as well. Since the current seemed to be very strong, you'd normally have the cross it further upstream than this.

The reason we were here was to meet up with the four others elves and their guide before setting out for the elven village Raratoia.

While looking around, I saw the silhouettes of people emerging from the trees near the Rydell riverbank.

An elven man in a beige cloak walked out while being cautious of his surroundings, and when they saw us, four elven girls ran straight to us.

The warrior Danka had been with us when we assaulted the kidnappers' base, and had been left to look after the girls.

Since the girls were running at me, I bent to down on one knee to receive them.

At that moment, Ponta jumped from my head and sat on the ground in front of me. The elven girls surrounded Ponta at once.

……Seems like Ponta had all of the popularity.

"You're earlier than expected…… I take it that we're bringing this armored gentleman along?"

Danka asked Ariane the question in a low voice in passing, once he saw me pretending to take a break in order to cover up my kneeling.

"Thanks to his help a disaster was avoided…… There are also some other circumstances the require him to meet with Raratoia's elder."

"……Don't bother the old man too much……"

Danka gave that simple reply to Ariane before he closing his eyes and mouth.

She patted down her white hair and simply said; "I know."

"Then, since there's no time lets proceed. Arc, could you please take us across the river?

With the pat on the shoulder that accompanied the question, I rose to my feet.

Since it’s just crossing a river, I can simply use【Dimensional Step】to transfer to the other side. While it’d be impossible to take everyone at once, it should be doable in three trips.

First, the four young girls were transferred to the other side and instantly started to diligently move about. Though they fell victim to Ponta’s cuteness, they still seemed capable of surviving in the wilderness.

After crossing the river without much difficulty, we plunged into the depths of the forest.

In addition, I was still carrying the sacks of gold coins over my shoulder; everyone besides me was an elf and was more or less capable of using spirit magic, so there was no danger even if a monster appeared while we traveled.

Ponta could also use wind spirit magic, and occasionally flew up to fetch nuts and fruit. Thanks to that we weren’t troubled for food and were able to quickly eat while taking breaks along the way……

When the sky was dyed in a deep red and the forest’s shadows thickened, we finally arrived at our destination.

Chapter 2:「Onward to Raratoia」Part 2

The forest opened into a clearing, and what appeared was a village that was completely different from a human one.

The village was surrounded by a wall that might have been over thirty meters tall and looked like it was part of a city.

As we approached the structure, I noticed that carvings of a mouse were engraved into the wall.

The wooden pillars became a radiant green color the farther up you looked and stood without any gaps in the structure; all of which resulted in an imposing and awe inspiring mass before my glaze.

The walls were surrounded by a myriad of thorns that stretched all of the way to the base of the wooden wall.

Thanks to all of this, the wall appeared to be one huge, green block.

The arched gate in front was only wide enough for two people to pass through at a time and wasn't that high. A portcullis made of black metal was installed above the gate, and it seems like it would take quite an impact to move it.

Atop the gate was what seemed to be a watchtower, but the roof was rounded like a flat cylinder, which gave the thing an overall mushroom-like appearance.

The four girls began to joyfully run towards the gate when it came into view.

Even from here, the figures of the two elves who stood guard in the watchtower could be seen as they pointed with their fingers.

"Haa, we've finally made it."

"I'm quite exhausted～"

Senna and Oona cleared the forest and showed relieved expressions as they finally returned to their home.

"Open the gate!! I am Ariane Glenys Maple! This is Danka Neil Maple! We're returning with people that had been captured by the humans! I need to make a request of the elder!"

Ariane took an erect stance before the gate and shouted the self-introduction before calmly waiting for a response.

Before long, the portcullis started to rise with a creaking sound, followed by wooden groaning as the doors behind it were also opened.

"I'll try to gain permission from the elder, so Arc you'll have to wait out here for a while."

She leaves after saying so; Danka, Senna, Oona, and the four girls followed through the gate, and two elven gatekeepers came out to replace them.

After they disappeared beyond the gate, the two gatekeepers stepped in front of it. One of them was glaring at me while the eyes of the other one were fixed on the fluffy fox sitting atop my head.

I moved a little bit away from the gate and put the sacks of gold coins aside while I settled in to wait for Ariane.

As for Ponta, she spent the time on the new challenge of earnestly trying to grab onto her own large tail. She would gradually approach her tail before twisting her body and jumping at it.

It was similar to a cat that I kept at my parent's house, but this child was doing well. "By their own rules" was probably on the mark?

While I was thinking about trivial things and watching over Ponta's unending battle, the sky became dark.

It'd had been about thirty minutes.

From within the watchtower, an orange light cast away the surrounding darkness. It made me think that unlike the human cities,there was actually electric lights here.

Wait, there was something similar Diento lord's castle……

Eventually, Ariane appeared from the illuminated front gate.

"Arc! I got the elder's permission! Come!"

Following her call, I stood up and placed the sacks of gold coins over my shoulder before making my way towards the gate. Ponta restlessly followed after me.

Under Ariana's guidance, I made my way beyond the portcullis. The walls were about 5 meters thick. After passing the inner portcullis, I finally entered the village of Raratoia.

What I saw inside of the village left a strange impression on me.

There was a field of crops beyond the wall, a spacious pasture to allow domestic animals to graze and wooden houses were sprinkled across the area. Unlike the homes of humans, the houses here were mushroom shaped. Each one had a slightly exposed wooden deck and eaves that stretched to the top. A unique pattern was carved into the supporting pillars of the houses, allowing a glimpse at the culture of these people.

Despite the quiet scenery, the sidewalk was made of beautifully laid cobblestone and street lights were placed at regular intervals, so there was no need to be anxious about where you walked.

When viewed at a distance, the combination of the lights and the night sky created a fantastic scenery.

From what I've seen, the quality of life here was superior to that of the humans.

With Ariane leading the way I advanced through the village, while two warriors from a guard post close to the entrance silently followed behind us. They're probably here to watch me.

After a while, we finally seemed to have arrived at our destination.

We stood in front of a huge tree… no, it was a building combined with a large tree.

Nestled between the large tree's thick roots was a mansion. The residence was a mixture between the natural and the artificial, and I had no clue how it was made.

However, lights were leaking out from the multiple windows in the trunk illuminating the entire area, giving it all a dignified appearance.

"This is the elder's house. Enter."

Saying so, Ariane opened the wooden front doors and prompted me to enter. However, before I could take a step, Ponta had already slipped inside at the first possible second.

Did you perhaps smell something appetizing?

Passing through the mansion's entrance, I entered what appeared to be atrium hallway. Huge pillars lined the center of the mansion and I could see various pathways that connected to the third floor. It seemed like I would be able to reach them by taking the left- or right-hand stairs on this floor.

Throughout the mansion were lampstands with crystals installed in them, which illuminated the rooms with a warm light. Even the intensity of the light was different compared to the oil lamps used in the human towns.

Two elves were in the center of the hall, while Ariane was off to the side.

One of the elves had blonde hair and appeared to be in his late twenties or early thirties. He was closely observing me while skillfully raising a single eyebrow. This elf was was dressed in attire similar to that of a Shinto priest, except that the outfit was adorned with the peculiar symbols of the elves.

The other person was a dark elf like Ariane and had her long white hair braided and set behind the nape of her lilac neck. She was dressed in traditional attire, and I noticed that the twin hills pushing up against it were even larger than Ariane's.

"Are you Arc? I welcome you to our home. I am Dylan Targ Raratoia, the elder of this village. It seems that my daughter was under your care."

The male elf introduced himself while holding out his hand.

At his words, I could feel that Ariane was slightly uncomfortable. Though her only reaction was that her shoulders slightly trembled.

She certainly said that she belonged to Maple, but she didn't say that it was her birthplace.

I take the right hand of Ariane's father and shake it.

"I am Ariane's mother, Glenys Aruna Raratoia. I am also 170 years old."

After I turned my eyes to Ariane after her mother's introduction, I saw that she was shaking her head. It seems that her age was different from what she said, but it didn't make much of a difference if she lowered it a little since it still exceeds the 100 years that a human could hope for.

It was difficult to react to such an intimate family introduction, but I somehow managed to squeeze out a response.

"This is my first time meeting a lord. As well as a lady. My name is Arc, a traveling adventurer."

"Ah, we shouldn't be speaking here. Let's talk on the second floor while we're having dinner."

The elder of Raratoia, Dylan suggested that we take this meeting to the second floor. I agreed on that and followed them upstairs.

There was a large room on the second floor that served as a dining room; chairs were placed around the wooden table and the kitchen seems to be located further back in the mansion.Delicious smells were drifting into the room from the kitchen.

Ponta promptly jumped on the table and sat down. I sat down in the seat recommended by Dylan and placed my baggage at my feet.

Ariane's mother Glenys said that the stew had warmed up, and went back towards the kitchen.

Once Ariane had taken her sit, Dylan sat down and slightly lowered his head.

"I heard the gist of the situation from my daughter. On behalf of all of the elves, you have our sincerest gratitude. I never imagined that there was a person capable of handling transfer magic. Although she had you as an unexpected fighting force, it was still surprising that my daughter killed the feudal lord on this outing……"

Dylan smiles wryly while scratching the back of his head. The person in question, Ariane, looked away with an unhappy expression on her face.

"Treaty or not, the nobles of Rhoden were disregarding it. Even if they are killed, they are in no position to complain about it!"

“Still you shouldn’t be so careless when discussing this matter…… I have to ask, why did you go to the feudal lord’s castle after you assaulted the kidnappers’ base?”

To answer this question, I summarized my encounter with the female ninja.

“……A person of the mountains and plains. Do the humans call them beastmen? The people of the mountains and plains are one-sidedly being hunted and turned into slaves by the humans.”

The beastmen race was the target of persecution, just like I expected.

“That person was probably part of the group called ‘Emancipator’ whose goal is to free the enslaved people of the mountains and plains flowing through the country. ‘Emancipator’ was formed about 600 years ago, and there are even rumors that the group’s prodigy work as spies in the Leburan empires…… Their intelligence network is far reaching, compared to us who stay in the forest……I see.”

Dylan crossed his arms in a kind of countenance but dropped his shoulders before long.

“Anyway, this time, the usual strategy succeeded so I’ll send the good news to the capital via the whisper birds…… however, since this needs to be discussed in the Great Council of Elders I need to speak with them personally, but activating the magic transfer formation will cost a lot of magic stones…”

Saying so, Dylan dropped his shoulders again and let out a sigh.

“Oh, I have just the thing for that……”

I moved the sacks of gold coins to the side and dragged out my luggage sack that had been thrown together with it. I reached inside and took out a stone the size of a baby’s fist and presented it to Dylan. Illuminated be the light of the room, the stone glowed a slight purple color.

It was the magic stone that I a took from the Giant Basilisk during the herb collection quest near Rata village.

“This…… is this alright? A magic stone of this purity it could be used as a considerable power source for magic tools right?”

Dylan spoke with an exasperated tone as he confirmed that what was in his hand stone was a magic stone.

Magic stones seem to be used as a power source for magical tools, though I didn’t understand how that worked. Besides, that stone wasn’t particularly precious to me, it was simply something I had.

“It would be the perfect opportunity to test the limits of the tool with this magic stone. There are also the elven slaves’ sale contracts that were recovered from kidnappers’ base to

consider.”

I rummaged through my luggage sack before taking out the sealed parchments and handing them all to Dylan.

He placed the magic stone to the side, removed the string of the parchments, and read through the contents of several sale contracts.

“The names of several people are mentioned repeatedly in these contracts… I’ve never heard of Drusus De Barishimon. After that, it’s Londes De Lanbaltic and Ferris De Hoban. The last one, Hoban is the name of a town stationed between the Annette and Parnassus mountains if I’m not mistaken……”

Dylan intently looked over the sales contract for a while, but before long his expression softened.

“When I head to Maple tomorrow I will bring up the previously mentioned matter and the sale contracts. Since there is no diplomatic contact with Rhodan, I may require Ariane to perform information collection and rescue operations again……”

Dylan had a bitter smile, but Ariane was completely unconcerned, as if this was a regular occurrence.

Since he was going to the elven capital, it’s the perfect opportunity to dump some unwanted baggage onto him.

“Since we have the chance, I was wondering if you’d be willing to take these gold coins with you?”

“I don’t mind, but isn’t this the loot that you got away with?”

Dylan returned a surprised expression and couldn’t help but reply honestly. Originally, the gold came from the sale of elven slaves. Since the money was made through illegal means, there’s no way that there would publicly demand for its return. There is also the possibility that they don’t even know who stole it in the first place.

When I told him about it, he raised an eyebrow, but he seemed to have approved. That literally took a load off my back.

“Thank you. We’ll probably use this to buy wheat from the Rinburuto Arch Dukedom. Since Canada is mostly composed of forest, it’s quite difficult to grow wheat. Hmm, you should stay here for a while. You have my permission to travel about Raratoia.”

“Now that the difficult matters are done with? Shall we have a meal? Today I made cream stew.”

After receiving permission to travel about Raratoia from Dylan, Ariane’s mother Glenys set a pot of cream stew on the table.

A basket of soft white bread was also placed on the dining table, followed by salads for everyone.

Even Ponta received her own dish of stew and promptly tried to eat it which elicited a bark from her since it was still very hot. After that she sat and waited patiently for it to cool down.

While I was looking at the appetizingly steaming stew in front of me, I was a little torn about what to do. That was when Dylan told me:

“I heard about your body from my daughter. Glenys and I are okay with it.”

Saying so, he motioned for me to go ahead.

After thinking it over, I quietly remove my helmet and place it on the dining room table. As expected, there was a great difference in the reaction of those who knew what to expect, since the two of them were only a little surprised and recommended the stew without another word.

It must take great courage to sit with an armored skeleton that had pale blue orbs instead of eyes.

As it had been recommended, I picked up a spoon and scooped up some stew. I bring the cooked meat and vegetable stew to my mouth and shallow. The taste of milk and butter spreads through my mouth as the meat broke apart.

Unlike the hard and sour bread I ate in the human town, this bread was soft and had a subtly fruity smell to it, almost like the bread that I’m used to.

Ariane’s mother seems to be an excellent cook, as I had trouble stalling my hand.

“Even though it’s right in front of me, it’s hard to believe that a skeleton is eating.”

Dylan mutters such as he looked at me with interest.I’m in complete agreement, it’s like my stomach lead to a fourth-dimensional pocket……

“You must like it. Go ahead and help yourself to another helping.”

“Kyun!”

Ponta, who was on the side, reacted to Glenys’s words first. She had already cleared her small portion of cooled stew and was asking for a second helping. The dish was even shining.

After I finished putting the rest of the stew in my four-dimensional stomach. I raised my dish to Glenys at the same time as Ariane.

“Another helping.”

“I would like to have another helping.”

Even if I had the body of a skeleton, I was still human inside, and after such a long time I could finally enjoy being able to eat with others again.

This was how my first night in the elf village of Raratoia went.

Chapter 3:「Forest Capital Maple」

The next day, the elder of Raratoia and Ariane's father went to a small shrine situated at the large tree in the center of the village.

As the sun was rising, the wind blowing through the village still carried with it an unpleasant chill.

The morning mist covered the distant scenery in a haze, leaving only a dim view of the scenery through the branches and leaves extending from the large tree; there seemed to be a slightly mysterious atmosphere drifting through the air.

Behind the small shrine, a small stream flowed from the east to the west through the heart of the village, with the sounds of the murmuring streamlet and the chirping of birds searching for fish resounding in the vicinity.

Surrounding the small shrine was a simple wooden enclosure, though it didn't seem to function as a barrier in particular. It reached no higher than the waist, acting simply as a boundary line for the shrine.

Two warriors stood guard in front of the door that was the entrance to the shrine. They were clad in sturdy leather armor, with one of the elf warriors carrying a sword on his hips. When they saw Elder Dylan approaching, they bowed their heads slightly and offered a greeting.

"Elder Dylan-sama, we've been waiting for you. The preparations for the transfer to Maple are complete."

Dylan offered words of gratitude, and after a few words of idle talk, the two soldiers simultaneously moved to the side. In order to not delay, Ariane also entered the shrine afterwards.

Behind Ariane, carrying the large sacks of gold coins that Arc had contributed yesterday, several men passed through the entrance together.

Although the shrine wasn't spacious to the extent of a mansion, the ceiling was higher in order to accommodate the atrium surrounding the tree in the center. The atrium was supported by thick pillars surrounding the tree.

In the center of the room was a slightly elevated circular stage where the magical tool was installed, lit up by the illumination from crystal-type lamps.

Inscribed into the surface of the circular stage was a complicated and mysterious magic formation; from it, a faint luminescence can be seen.

This small shrine here was the elf village Raratoia's transfer position.

The first generation chieftain of the Great Canada Forest was the one who set up the

transfer formations in Maple and the main villages. Installed 800 years ago, it was maintained for generations by village elders, and now it's an essential facility for connecting each village to the capital city, Maple.

While Dylan walked forward until he was before the transfer formation, from the room to the side where the shrine's manager lived, a petite elven man made an appearance.

Though the man looked to be in his forties, elves had a life span of nearly 400 years, and unlike humans, they didn't physical age beyond this point.

"Elder Dylan, the preparations for the transfer formation are already complete. However, since this transfer wasn't scheduled, this means that the magic stone fuel we need to operate it is insufficient, so…"

The petite man who managed the formation spoke with a slightly painful expression, while Dylan gave a liberal nod that gave off an atmosphere of knowing exactly what the man was trying to say before he took out the magic stone he received from Arc yesterday and handed it over to the manager.

"Use this magic stone as the power source. Sorry to trouble you."

Upon receiving the magic stone, the manager gave a small bow and withdrew.

Making sure, Dylan stepped forward onto the central magic formation and called for Ariane.

The men following behind with the luggage lowered the bags of gold onto the formation and waited off to the side of the small shrine.

At a quick pace, Ariane stood next to her father Dylan in response to his call, while the formation at their feet began to shine brilliantly. As a dazzling light engulfed the shrine, they felt a floating sensation for a moment; when the light settled, they were standing in a place that didn't change much from the room where they were at before.

However, the transfer magic formation at their feet was larger than it was before, and the shrine itself was considerably larger. There were many ornaments scattered throughout the shrine, and guards who previously weren't present stood here and there.

They had transferred from the small shrine and arrived at the forest capital, Maple.

After a simple greeting to the manager in charge of Maple's shrine and requesting for someone to transport the sacks of gold coins to central government office, Dylan and Ariane left the shrine.

What awaited them outside the shrine was an enormous city.

Not only were there similar sparse large tree buildings to those in Raratoia, even larger trees also stood in lines here and there. Weaving their way through the roads running in every direction, an overflowing number of elves could be seen.

The early morning blue sky with its chilly atmosphere was concealed by the tops of the large tree-like buildings; the light of the sun, which was still low in the sky, wasn't sufficient enough to reach the valley.

However, the streets lined with shops, with people touting full of energy, and shoppers gazing at goods in a commotion, weren't any less lively than that which was displayed on streets filled with humans.

While barter was still the dominant form of trade for the elves, it was common to use gold coins here in Maple.

Ariane, after such a long time away from the capital, took a deep breath so as to ascertain the air, and stretched.

The forest capital was a metropolis where more than 100,000 people lived. The appearance of such a large city in the Great Canada Forest where a monster supposedly rampaged in its interior was something that the humans would never be able to believe.

After all, in the 800 years since its founding, there was never a time when capital Maple had invited a human inside. Not even people from the Rinburuto Arch Dukedom who were trading partners have been graced with a view of this city.

The reason was because various things would cause inconveniences if the humans were to become aware of this place. One of those reasons just so happened to pass before Ariane's eyes.

He had a short stature of around 130 centimetres, but that doesn't mean he's a small child. Large burly arms thicker than those of dark elves along with an overall firmly-built body, short pointed ears, and a lengthy beard extending to his waist.

The person who just passed by was a man of the dwarf race.

Formerly the leaders in metallurgy and consequently being targeted, they were a race officially known by the human society as having perished. If you strained your eye and looked properly, you can catch sight of them here and there throughout the town, blended with the abundant crowds of elves.

The metropolis of Maple was a magical city formed through the combination of elves' spirit magic and the dwarves' metallurgy technology, while it was the founding patriarch who created the opportunity to build this city.

The founding chieftain also strictly prohibited inviting any humans to Maple.

However, the other villages in the outer circumference were left to the discretion of the elders. Villages on the outskirts of the forest traded with humans as their towns had the advantage of being relatively close to the villages. However, most of the villages further within the forest's depths and away from human habitats rarely encountered them. Hence, it was rare for a human to enter the other villages as well.

Arc's invitation to Raratoia was a case where Ariane, unexpectedly the elder's daughter, acted as the mediator – a considerable exception.

After Ariane thoroughly enjoyed Maple's invariant scenery, with her father's beckoning ahead, she ran toward Dylan's direction.

Dylan advanced through the intervening roads in the valley of large tree buildings, weaving through the crowd without hesitation.

A short time later, they emerged in a place where the view that was previously blocked by the large tree buildings suddenly opened up. In the center of the vast clearing stood the largest structure they'd seen so far: made from a giant tree, it was like a tower as it soared before their eyes.

It was at such a towering height that your neck would become sore looking at it as you approached.

Many guards stood in front of the spacious entrance, constantly keeping a watchful eye on the people entering and exiting the building. After passing through the front entrance to the front counter and conveying that they had business, they were met with a female elf receptionist immediately.

Led by the receptionist, they were guided down a corridor to one of the cylindrical rooms among the great number lined up within the building.

In the center of the cylindrical room, something similar to a crystal ball was placed on a pedestal, with half of it embedded inside. When the female guide touched the crystal ball, it slowly began to emit a faint light.

Without much warning, the floor of the cylindrical room rose, moving without any sound as it ascended higher and higher.

Before long, the rising floor came to a stop, reaching its intended level, with the connecting passageway leading to the tower's outer part. With a window running along the entire outer circumference, it offered an unbroken view of the entire city.

Just facing the west, all of the Maple would appear at one's feet, with an enormous lake spread out on the horizon. Even looking at the north, or at the south, the lake's edges can't be seen.

Called the Great Slave by the founding chieftain, the huge lake was the city's precious source of water, providing furthermore an abundance of fish to catch – a prevail treasure trove.

While looking at the glittering scenery with the morning sun reflecting off the Great Slave lake, sparkling, they advanced through the corridor and finally arrived at their destination.

Before long, they arrived before a set of large double doors. After the female clerk opened

one side of the doors and informed the person within of the arrival of visitors, she stepped aside, prompting the two to enter.

Ariane and Dylan nodded at each other and passed through the doors.

There were no splendorous decorations or the like inside; rather, the atmosphere within the large room was quite subdued. There was a large round table placed in the center of the room, with eleven men and women seated around it.

The seated people were almost all elves, but the figures of a dark elf and a dwarf can also be seen. This was the central governing council of Maple's ten grand elders, with the third generation chieftain, Brian Boyd Evangeline Maple, assembled with them.

The current chieftain had genealogy that can be traced back to the founding chieftain, Evangeline, though it was unusual for an elf to inherit and call themselves with the first generation's name.

"Elder Dylan of Raratoia, is it already time to report the results of the recent rescue mission? Why are you here to report it in person?"

A person sitting in the back of the room calmly asked Dylan those questions.

The man with the calm atmosphere looked to be in his forties and had long green-tinged blonde hair that was tied together with a braid colored with complex patterns. He was chieftain Brian, the third generation head.

In response to the question, her father spoke with a rarely shown expression of nervousness, leading Ariane to occasionally glance at Dylan's state with curious eyes. When the conversation reached the part about the feudal lord, his expression darkened slightly and his eyes were lowered.

When Dylan finished his report, the noises in the room disappeared, filling it with a quiet atmosphere, making the slight movement of someone standing up seem extremely loud.

"Well, for the time being, the prisoners were rescued, and the two other unidentified people's safety were secured as well."

When one of the great elders said this to start up the conversation, it was like a dam had broken as opinions began to be exchanged, thrown in rapid succession.

"The problem is the fact that the two rescued were held by the feudal lord. Isn't this matter a little troubling?"

"However, they personally violated the binding treaty from 400 years ago. Considering this, then there's no grounds on which the other side can protest in this matter…"

"Wait wait, the feudal lord participating in the kidnapping this time is a legitimate reason to start a war! Have they already forgotten that, 600 years ago, they made war on us and split

their country in the process!?”

“The tale of the war 600 years ago that we heard about from our parents is enough for us, but it’s nothing but a story written in history books for the humans… It truly seems impossible to build a lasting friendly relationship with them.”

“Humph, the opposition may not be able to say anything if we talk about supplying them with a bounty of magic stones…”

The grand elders each shouted with a loud voice proclaiming their opinions, and the hall fell into pandemonium.

Dylan who looked at the state of affairs and chieftain Brian sitting at the back simultaneously let out a loud sigh.

Eventually, with lunch interposed, the back and forth dispute was brought to a tentative conclusion, but it was hard to say that the settled conclusion was very significant.

“For now, we’ll just wait and see…”

While the circular floor soundlessly slid down the cylindrical room, Dylan stood next to Ariane, muttering the conclusion reached a while ago.

The Rhoden Kingdom had began a war 600 hundred years ago; however, the number of engagements were nearly nonexistent. At that time, the Tishiento dukes kept an opposing stance on war with the elves and broke off from the Rhoden kingdom, forming the Rinburuto Arch Dukedom.

Since then, interactions with the humans such as trade were only limited to those of Rinburuto.

At the time of the war, the majority of the troops of the Rhoden Kingdom’s king and feudal lords were lost; it fell into the brink of destruction. Fortunately, the country still remained to this day thanks to the fact that the Reburan Empire, in a dispute for succession of the throne, had split into East and West, unfolding with it a fierce war that was the only saving grace allowing the kingdom to recover.

Afterwards, the king of Rhoden 400 years ago formally apologized for the war, and in a display of goodwill, signed a treaty that prohibited the capture of elves.

Certainly, the feudal lord’s assassination this time might have been excessive, but the fault lay with the kingdom – an opinion that would be hard to appeal.

In anticipation of the arrival of an official messenger, by saying that preparation had to be done, things had finally settled down.

“I’m sorry, Elder Dylan.”

His daughter, who pulled the trigger this time, had a gloomy expression with downcast eyes. Gently caressing the head of beautiful white hair she inherited from her mother, Dylan gave a wry smile.

"Ariane, you're still young; besides, the matter still hasn't been settled yet, right?"

Saying so, he took out the aforementioned contract relating to the trafficking of elves from his breast pocket. It was said that the investigation of the people mentioned in the contract would again be entrusted to Dylan.

"It seems like you'll have a chance to repent since they asked you to remain a part of the investigation. We can officially request assistance from Arc-kun this time. Nevertheless, that took longer than expected; there's no longer a chance to meet with Ivin after specially coming to Maple."

Dylan had a slightly worn-out expression as he shrugged his shoulders. Ivin was another daughter of his – Ariane's older sister.

"Did you have some business with Onee-san?"

Ariane had a look of curiosity as she recalled the unyielding face of the sister she hadn't seen in a while.

"Eh, have you not spoken to her yet, Ariane? I heard that she's getting married next year. Though actual feelings about it haven't set in as I've yet to see her fiancé's face…"

Ariane was so surprised at the her father's brief comment that it looked like her jaw would dislocate.

"What?! You're lying!? That battle maniac of a sister who said she would never get married in her life?! Is the fiancé some warrior whom I know?"

"No, according to what I've heard, she's engaged to a farmer."

Ariane could only express a look of disbelief.

An unparalleled battle enthusiast, possessing abilities that surpassed even Ariane's, she was a powerful warrior prided by Maple, boasting of outstanding strength above all else. Her sister was one who showed only interest in strong opponents, so Ariane could only be dumbfounded by the story that seemed to be about an entirely different person.

When they left the giant tree tower that served as the central building while listening to such talk, the sky's early-morning blue color had already changed into that of dusk.

The magical tools' light from the windows of the large tree buildings in addition to the street lights underfoot repelled the approaching darkness.

The sister she thought would never change had changed in a way unknown to herself,

causing some feelings of bewilderment and loneliness to be born in her heart.

As she was lost in thought over these newly formed emotions, with every passing moment, the sky darkened.

With few words between them, Ariane and Dylan walked side-by-side down the well-lit street as they quickly returned to the shrine leading back to Raratoia.

Chapter 4:「Tour of Raratoia」

First thing in the morning, the smell of breakfast and the sound of bird's chirping reached my ears and nose. My eyes were tempted into opening and I was able to catch sight of my surroundings.

Raising my head to look around the room, I saw that my silver full-body armor with white and blue undertones was sitting next to the bed.

Yesterday was the first time I took off the armor to sleep since I came to this world. Since I was nothing but a skeleton there was no need to cover myself, but I would feel weird if I didn't.

When I started to sit up, I noticed my body was heavier than usual. Looking under the cover, I saw that Ponta had sneaked under my blankets at some point during the night. Moreover, she was sleeping inside of my rib cage.

"Dowa!"

I unintentionally shouted in surprise.

After removing Ponta from my chest, I placed her down beside the bed while she continued her trip through dreamland.

Pulling a creature out of your own rib cage……, what an indescribable sensation—

While I got out of bed, the sound of my bones lightly cracking「Kokikoki」could be heard. You'd think that there would be a loss of flexibility with a body that lacked muscle, but I didn't have that feeling.

I put on the armor that had been off to the side before putting the helmet on.

While the elder's family was aware of my body's secret, I didn't need to share it with every single one of Raratoia's inhabitants. Dylan said that very few people actually knew about it last night. In fact, the only ones besides Dylan's family that knew were the former captives from Diento Senna and Oona.

I heard that it was rare for humans to enter elven villages, so when it happened the news quickly spread amongest the villagers.

You should avoid unnecessary trouble when you can.

The black cloak I let Oona borrow yesterday was in my hands; she had already returned it, but neither the black cloak or the flashy armor would detract from my figure inside the village.

Since it wasn't necessary to wear the cloak inside the village, I shoved it into my luggage bag.

Once I was ready to leave the room, Ponta rose up unexpectedly and made her way in front of the door, having a good posture and wagging her fluffy tail.

It seems Ponta was attracted by the smell that was drifting in from downstairs.

When I opened the room door, she nearly butted her head against it as she ran down the stairs as fast as her little body could take here.

According to the elves, spirit beasts can last a long time without eating, and they are rarely seen eating in public.

When they leave the forest for more residential areas, it was possible to see spirit beasts taking part in more meals; however, this rule didn't seem to apply to Ponta since she had a healthy appetite no matter the location.

When I reached the room on the second floor from last night's delicious meal, Ponta was already absorbed in her plate of breakfast, and Ariane's mother Glenys was watching her.

She was wearing an apron on top of the elves' traditional dress she had been wearing yesterday.

"Ah, good morning. Were you able to get a good night's rest? For a skeleton to sleep…… I just find that hard to imagine."

Glenys most have tried to imagine it because she had an amused smile on her face.

While it might have been amusing to see nothing but a skeleton outlined by covers, it took a very bold person to joke about that in front of the person himself without hesitation.

Unlike Ariane, there was a gentle atmosphere surrounding her through.

"It's rather early, Glenys-dono."

"Kyun!"

When I returned Glenys's greeting, Ponta also gave her own; she raised her head to call out before stuffing her face with breakfast again.

"I've prepared breakfast, so please sit down and wait a moment."

After petting Ponta, Glenys stood up and took her apron figure to the back kitchen.

"Much obliged. By the way, I haven't seen Dylan-dono or Ariane-dono, have they already headed off to Maple?"

While looking around, I asked Glenys a question while she went off towards the back kitchen.

"Yes, earlier this morning."

Glenys gave a brief answer as she returned from the kitchen with a tray of breakfast. She sat the tray in front of me before taking the seat opposite to my own.

I put my helmet to the side, before placing my hands together above the meal in front of me.

The meal was composed of fried sausage links covered in a white sauce, light brown toast, fried eggs, and a side of miso soup.

When I bite into it, the sound of the crisp toast and the smell of cooked bread welled up; the fried sausages were both tender and seasoned to perfection. Furthermore, there was something familiar about the taste of the sauce, and I ended up letting out a surprised cry.

"Mayonnaise……"

"Oh, you know of it? It's a sauce that the first chieftain devised, I thought that it had only spread to the humans of Rinburuto……"

Glenys tilted her head in confusing at the unexpected revelation.

The name of the concoction seemed to be mayonnaise. Since mayonnaise was not that hard to make, it can be done if you have a little knowledge about it.

The first chieftain built Maple 800 years ago, and it might have been possible that he had been someone in a similar situation to my own. The elves had long life spans, so was it possible that the person was still alive?

"Is the first chieftain still alive by any chance?"

While popping another fried egg in my mouth, I asked Glenys the question without much hope.

"Fufufu. While elves indeed have great longevity, we can not live that long. The average life expectancy of an elf is about 400 years."

Still a 400-year lifespan……, wasn't the average lifespan of a human around 50 years during this time period? No, wouldn't those in power be able to extend their lives with the use of recovery magic?

It was possible that the first chieftain had been someone in the same situation as me, but there was no way to confirm it when the person in question is deceased. Since there was no way to confirm it, it's better that I don't dwell on it forever.

After this, I plan to explore the elven village of Raratoia today.

Since I got Dylan's permission, I planned to leisurely spend my day walking around. Glenys agreed to act as my guide, but there would also be observers. Thinking about the relationship between the humans and the elves, these measures couldn't be helped, so I

didn’t really mind.

Since Dylan was scheduled to return in the evening, it’s better to not cause any trouble in the village.

Just like last night’s dinner, the food was delicious. The staple foods of commoner humans were lightly seasoned potatoes, beans, and different types of porridge. There was meat from monsters to make a variety of meat dishes, and a few common spices were available as well.

I’m thankful for being able to stay in a place where I can eat delicious food.

When I brought the last fried sausage link to my mouth, Ponta focused in on it from her place beside the table.

When I started waving the link on the fork back and forth like a maestro changing the tempo, Ponta waved her head side to side.

I resigned myself and gave the last sausage link to Ponta, who happily seized it before gnawing on it.

Glenys laughed cheerfully as she stares at the scene with warm eyes. A skeleton could not change its complexion, but I cleared my throat to change the atmosphere.

“You seem to be amused Glenys-dono”

Showing my gratitude for the meal, I stood up while putting my helmet back on; once she was finished, Ponta used wind magic to fly to her regular spot.

When I went down to the first floor of the tree-like mansion, I looked out from the front entrance.

Yesterday, the darkness made it difficult grasp the area in its entirety; however thanks to the morning sun, the view from the mysteriously fused structure became clear.

While the cityscape of humans gave off a similar feel to medieval Europe, the scenery before me looked as if it came out of a game or novel. The buildings in this village were the likes of which I’ve never seen. Several of the houses in the distance were basically large wooden mushroom.

When I looked back in the mansion, I saw that Glenys no longer had her apron on as she approached.

“Are these buildings unusual to humans?”

When she noticed that I was intently looking around, she gave me a small smile while asking her question.

“Um, I simply have no clue as to how these structures were built.”

“That’s right, it might be impossible to create them without the application of spirit magic.”

The buildings seem to be constructed with spirit magic, and it must be a taxing process as the were only a few of them around

“Sometimes fluffy foxes like Ponta would take up residence in this mansion’s hollows. Fluffy foxes usually travel the winds in a skulk after all……”

While she was talking, she looked at Ponta who sat on top of my head. Ever since I used magic to heal her injuries, that spot has been her favorite place.

If we ever came across Ponta’s companions, then it would be her right to leave with them.

Thinking that, I followed Glenys as she led me through the village.

I was met with curiosity as we passed by other elves, so it wasn’t all that different from the humans.

The walls of Raratoia village happened to encompass a large area of land. From a distance, you could see the green top of the village’s entrance.

Inside the wall was a vast pasture for the cattle to graze, and a beautifully maintained stream flowed throughout the village. There was also a field with a variety of crops planted in it.

Before long we came upon a shelf entwined with strange ivy plants that had gourd-like fruits sprouting from their tops.

“Glenys-dono, what are these?”

The gourd-like fruit was semi-transparent and filled with liquid; the core floated in the center like a hydroponics cultivator. The surface was rubbery when I poked it, kind of like a plastic bag filled with water.

“Watermelons. While the content is mostly water, the skins are still usable. Once you drain the water and smoke the skin, the husk can be used to tenderize meat with herbs.”

“Huh, was the fried sausage I ate this morning made like that?”

“Yes, since some types of monster meat are rather hard, they need to be processed before they can be eaten. The first chieftain was the one that devised the way for us the watermelons in such a way. Though in the old days, it seems that the watermelons were only used as water sources.”

The first chieftain seemed to have been eager in their search for a decent meal.

When I looked around I saw an elven fieldworker bowing in our direction. There were many other elves working in the surrounding fields, similar to those from the human villages.

Honestly, the number of elves here made it felt more like a town than a village.

“Is this a relatively large village? There seems to an abundant number of elves here.”

“For security reasons, multiple smaller villages combined into a single large one; maybe around 4000 people live here?”

4000 people living in the depths of a forest was a rather good number when I thought about it. While I thought, a girl ran towards me from the opposite side of the field. I recognized the girl as one of those that were rescued on the mission.

When she was in front of me the girl stops and looked up. Her braided green-tinged blonde hair cutely bobbed up and down.

“Armor ojii-san! Can Ponta have this?”

The girl held out something in her hands when she asked. She was holding up a small red apple-like fruit.

Ponta’s twitching nose indicated that the fruit’s sweet smell had provoked her, and before long she jumped from my head to the girl’s palm.

“Oh, I don’t mind.”

The girl gave her cheerful replay before giving the whole apple to Ponta. After thinking for a while, Ponta stated spinning the apple around as she took bites out of it.

From behind the fascinated little girl, a young looking man and woman came up to me and deeply bowed their heads.

“For rescuing our daughter, thank you very much.”

The young man, who seemed to be the girl’s father, looked straight at me as he offered his gratitude. The woman, who was apparently her mother, lowered her head multiple time as her sobbing and tears prevented her from speaking coherently.

“What, there’s no need for your thanks. I was only employed by Ariane-dono, so there’s no need to humble yourselves this much.”

However, the couple shook their heads and once again expressed their gratitude. The strange situation caused the surrounding farmers to curiously look towards us.

When the two parents noticed that they were causing a scene in the middle of the village, they lowered their heads and offered their gratitude once again.

Since I only took Ariane’s personal request, all of this was causing my back to itch a little. No, since it was me, it would be my spine and shoulder blades that itched.

Ponta seemed to be satisfied with her meal because she skillfully leaped back on my head

and dozed off.

Fortunately, the two managed to regain their composur

When I looked around I saw that the sun was already setting and the installed streetlights began to light.

Glenys called out to inform me that Dylan would be returning soon and that we should be making our way back to the mansion.

Chapter 5:「The Trader Doesn't Bargain」

By the time we got back to the mansion, Dylan and Ariane had already returned from Maple.

Ariane wasn't wearing her protective gear or her long-sleeved dress with the modest length hem. Today, she was wearing the elves' traditional wear and a haori coat that hung off her shoulders. The smooth lilac skin of the dark elves that made up her ample cleavage was exposed without shame.

It was perfectly fine if she wanted to enjoy a different look, but my brain capacity will probably be cut in half tonight.

While discussing the meeting with the elders, Ariane and the rest of us made our way to the second-floor dining room. Seems like this room served as the regular place for eating meals.

Glenys vanished into the kitchen, saying that she was going to prepare dinner, and before long the sound of cooking and humming could be heard.

At Dylan's recommendation, I took a seat while he sat at the head of the table and Ariane on the other side.

Ponta sat on my lap, (lazily) placing her front paws and head on the table.

"As I've already told Ariane, the information that was gathered from the human sale contracts will help us find our brethren that have been sold. That was what we discussed at the great elders' meeting. We are mostly ignorant of the human world, so it's impossible to dispatch a large number of warriors. So I thought that we could continue to rely on you, Arc, to help Ariane with her missions."

Without averting his eyes, Dylan calmly spoke about the future with a sincere expression.

I myself am not too informed on the human world as well, but it would be difficult for a large group of elves to sneak into a human town.

Next to Dylan, Ariane was also looking at me with a serious expression. There can be no hesitation in deciding to board a ship I planned to take……

While I was a little troubled, Dylan offered a reward for his request.

"There aren't many rewards we could offer to you, since most of the gold coins have already been transferred……"

Dylan pauses for a moment to offer a wry smile.

"So, how about I provide you with information instead? In fact, there is a spring that is rumored to dispel every type of curse, it might be able to remove the one placed on your body. Still, nothing can be guaranteed at the moment……"

"Is there really such a spring?"

Hearing Dylan's story, his daughter Ariane tilted her head in confusion. Dylan shrugged his shoulders at his daughter's question.

"According to a reliable source, the spring is located near the Dragon King's Tree. ……Since it is very dangerous to reach that place, there is no guarantee you will be able to return alive……"

"The Dragon King's Tree, that's in the hinterlands……No, that would still be impossible."

Ariane was going to say something, she gained some insight on her own and remained silent. The hinterlands were probably a place that the humans nor elves could gain control over. As for my staying in this village, it will be decided by my next choice.

The only worrisome aspect was……

"What's the Dragon King's Tree?"

I voiced an honest question about a name I never heard, so after clearing his throat, Dylan began to explain what the Dragon King's Tree was.

The tree called the Dragon King's Tree, is a large type of tree that only grows in the Dragon King's territory. The presence of the Dragon King's enormous magical power has caused the tree's spirit to be altered.

"As a result of the tree's altered spirit, the leaves and root of the tree have been blessed with a variety of abilities. The deeply set roots also began to affect the surrounding area. In fact, I've heard that the branches and leaves of the tree can be sold for a considerable price among the humans."

"Simply put, the spirit of the tree dwells in those parts and bestows those abilities. However, since the tree is within the Dragon King's territory, it's unlikely that the spring's gift will be given for free……"

Following up on Dylan's explanation, Ariane mentioned this with a sigh.

According to what they told me, not only was the journey perilous, but the destination itself was dangerous as well. Even with the high-spec body, you'd have to pardon me from taking on the dragon king alone.

I told Ariane that my skeletal body was the result of a curse, instead of the character editing that I did to make it look like this, so the part about breaking the curse was really my personally crafted role-play.

However, the elves say that all undead are characterized by the impurity that surrounds them, but it seemed that I lacked said characteristic.

This body still hold many mysteries——

Then, in this case it might not be bad to help people searching for a treatment for this body—— at the very least it wouldn't be a bad purpose in life.

Though there is something I have to hear first.

"Hum, would it be safe to enter the Dragon King's territory?"

Let's say that, for the sake of lifting the curse, I enter the Dragon King's home and am unable to defeat him, in that case I would be unceremoniously eaten. Well, considering that I only consist of bones it is unlikely that I'll end up being eaten……

However, it seems that my fear was unfounded.

"It's alright. If a human suddenly entered, it would be bad, but if we elves gain permission to do so beforehand there should be no problem."

From what I heard, the Dragon King was capable of human speech and he was willing to listen to reason. Canada Forest was also the place where the Dragon King decided to settle and was under his protection.

The elves were said to be a race with low numbers, but it seemed to me that their military might wasn't inferior to other countries.

"When you go to the spring, we can go together Arc."

"Well, Arc? Are you willing to lend the elves your power for a while more?

The elder of Raratoia, Dylan, was sincerely lowering his head to a human like me.

While it was a groundless expectation, it still would be nice to travel the world helping people. However, while I thought things over, Ariane leaned forward, making her abundant chest stand out more.

"Could you please do it for me, Arc?"

"Hum, I see."

……While I had the bad habit of being unable to turn down a woman's sincere request, it also certain that I would really enjoy traveling with Ariane.

Even though I am nothing but bones, I'm still a man on the inside.

"As long as it is within my modest abilities, your humble servant will gladly help you Ariane-dono."

"Thank goodness. Elves tend to stand out in human cities…… so I was worried asking this of my daughter."

Dylan lowered his head again before he offered his right hand after hearing me accept their request. I take his hand and shook it.

“Are the difficult talks over yet? Supper is ready.”

With these words, Glenys brought back some dishes from the kitchen and proceeded to put one in front of each of us.

Ponta, who had been stationary ‘til now, stood on her hind legs as her nose twitched upon smelling the dish.

Tonight’s meal consisted of bread, salad, bean soup and the odd inclusion of hamburger steak as the main dish.

An already cooled plate of hamburger steak was placed before Ponta, and she happily wagged her tail while taking bites out of the meal.

“Well, should we continue the small talk after the meal is finished.”

When Dylan put an end to the conversation, I take a look at the plate in front of me. I took off my helmet, and placed my hands together above the meal.

Though I didn’t know the source of the steak, the meat was rather juicy and the blend of herbs and spices made for a sufficiently delicious hamburger. Thought there was a faint hint of nutmeg, it wasn’t that much different from the hamburgers on earth.

There weren’t any meat dishes with nutmeg in the human cities, so the elves might own a monopoly on the spice.

I thoroughly enjoyed the nostalgic taste of the meal, we began discussing the details of our plans for tomorrow before bringing the meeting to a close.

When I returned to the room I slept in last night, I took off my armor and placed it besides the bed.

The magic tool that the elves made acted similarly to an oil lamp and illuminated the entire room.

Ponta blocked out the light with her tail by curling up in a ball beside the bed, and before long the sound of soft snoring could be heard. Seems like she had a full stomach.

Placing my hand on the light and calling『Lights out』, and the room darkens as the lights shut off without a sound.

Once my eyes adjusted to the darkness, the outline of the room became faintly visible thanks to the moonlight seeping in from the window.

While I was looking at the scenery visible through the side window, I sat quietly on the bed in order to avoid waking Ponta. Since this mansion was made of a tree, the sky above was

shrouded by the leaves and branches, so the moonlight seeping in from the window was unreliable.

Illuminated by the faint moonlight, I raised my arm and looked at its bony form.

—— was this body really the result of a curse?

If this really was a curse, shouldn't I at least consider a way to break it?

In order for humans to capture elves, a magic eating collar that prevented the use of magic was attached to them, and the solution was to have me break them with a magic spell.

The spell【Anti-Curse】belonged to the intermediate bishop class. There was the possibility that the curse would be lifted if I tried to cast that type of magic on myself.

The high-level pope skill【Holy Purification】has the ability to remove all curses, but it simultaneously dealt massive damage to undead.

Even though I lacked the characteristics of the undead, I still couldn't bring myself to try it.

The act of casting magic on oneself required an unexpected amount of courage, especially if one doesn't know the source of that power. However, if I thought about it carefully, transfer magic moves me to an entirely different location. It should be the same as submitting myself to magic, because if something went wrong, it wouldn't be that strange to end up "trapped within a stone".

I should at least give it a try.

I place my right hand over the left one and target the spell on my left index finger.

"【Anti-Curse】"

When I calmly invoked the spell, a magic formation appeared beneath my palm before releasing lights that were absorbed into my targeted finger. The bone of my finger took the form of human's above the first joint.

"Oooh! …… oh?"

The results were contrary to what I expected, causing me to let out a surprised yelp; however, it lasted only for a moment before it changed to a questioning one.

My left index finger, only retained its human appearance for several second before it disappeared. With my skeleton hand raised under the moonlight, it was as if what happened before was merely a dream.

Trying to expand the range of the spell, I cast【Anti-curse】on my left forearm. When the light was absorbed, a flesh and blood forearm appeared.

The arm that was once bone was right before my eyes; the forearm was rather muscular

and a shade of brown. Though, it was possible that it was just a tan since the moonlight was rather unreliable. Was the fact that this body was more muscular than my original body a result of my level?

"?!"

There was a strange feeling of discomfort when I faintly brushed the arm, and before long the flesh dissipated again; returning to its bone-like state.

I grasped my skeletal left arm repeatedly to check its condition, but the strange feeling was already gone.

After that, I cast【Anti-curse】on my left arm several times, but each time the flesh would return back to its skeletal form. Every time the flesh and blood arm returned, so to did the discomfort, but that feeling disappeared again once it reverted back to its bone form.

The time I spent experimenting gave me an understanding that this body can be affected to a certain extent by the spell. However, the effect was only temporary, as if the curse was persistent or something?

I laid my body down on the bed.

I wouldn't find any answers even if I thought about it with my literally empty head. It best to take a rest when all you have are bad ideas, and hope things get better.

To prevent another invasion from Ponta, I wrapped the blanket around my body. I probably looked like a mummy from the side, was the last thing I thought as I shut my eyes.

Chapter 6:「The Purpose of Preference」

In the forest where the morning fog shrouded the towering trees in a mist, the dark elf Ariane walked ahead with her gray cloak fluttering in the wind, while behind her, I followed closely so as to not fall behind.

The black cloak covering my armor had become standard attire while traveling these days. Above my helmet, Ponta gave a large yawn with tired eyes as she tried not to fall.

Early this morning, we left Raratoia Village, with us now heading for the Riburuto River that flowed through the forest of Canada.

As a result of last night's discussion, it was decided that we would search the territories of the nobles whose names had appeared on several contracts. There were three names that appeared the most on the contract, and the name Ferris De Hoban was one that Dylan was familiar with.

The town named Hoban was governed by said noble, and since it was said to be within the Rhoden Kingdom, it was decided that we'd head for it first.

The town Hoban was apparently one of the towns along the highway that connected to the elves' only official trading partner within the Rhoden kingdom, the Rinburuto Archduchy.

The town was a considerable distance from Raratoia. We first had to pass through the elven village Darutowa, which was downstream the Riburuto River. From there, after travelling west through the north side of the Annette mountain range, and passing through the vast forest afterwards, our first stop was the human town of Cellist.

Though using the transfer magical tool to travel from Ratatoia to Darutowa would take an instant, we decided against it as there was no way to know how the other side would react to a human learning of that secret.

I may know of the elves' transfer magic, and furthermore be able to use it myself, but amongst the elves, only a small portion was aware of that fact, so such problems were inevitable.

Moreover, besides being able to transfer to locations I've already been to previously with【Transfer Gate】, there's also【Dimensional Step】that can be used to travel short distances when the situation called for it, so I figured there would be no troubles, if any at all.

However, now in the middle of the dense overgrown forest without any roads, two people carrying bags of luggage on their shoulders along with one animal kept walking endlessly. Though in Ponta's case, you can't say that she was really walking…

There was a reason why【Dimensional Step】couldn't be used.

It wasn't possible to use general magic anymore. Ariane said that the fog that hung over our

eyes, enveloping us, was the cause.

It was especially easy to lose your way within the particularly thick fog. A short distance away, the scenery became a hazy white, while anything past that can't be seen through the fog.

With such a fog covering the thick forest and valley, the flow of mana seemed to have become obstructed, making magic difficult to control, resulting in the loss of the ability to use even the worst magic.

However, this seemed to be a problem that mainly affected humans, since the elves' magic was directly controlled by spirits, and monsters and spirit beasts were immune to the fog's effect.

It seemed to act like Minovsky particles…

Using basic magic such as starting an ordinary fire wasn't a problem, so this fog may affect only sensitive types of magic.

Before long, I began to hear the sound of running water from beyond the veil of fog. Somehow or other, we reached our first destination, Riburuto River.

When we approached the riverbank, the surroundings immediately cleared up. Thanks to the wind that blew along the river, the fog was remarkably thinner compared to the forest. The view even extended unobstructed from downstream the river all the way to its upper reaches.

However, our view opening up wasn't all good, as we caught sight of several dragonfly groups flying around the edge of the river.

The dragonflies must have felt threatened by the sudden emergence of intruders from the forest. From their jaws, a grating gichigichi sound was made while they flew straight for us.

With their their large transparent wings expanded and bodies just under two metres in length, these huge dragonflies would be daunting even if you didn't have an aversion to insects.

"Be careful, Arc!"

"Nu-o!?"

Ariane pulled the Lion King's Sword from the sheath on her waist in a practiced manner, and greeted the approaching dragonflies. Her beautiful long white hair shook with a silvery light whenever she ran, with the severed wings and torsos of the dragonflies falling down onto the ground beneath her.

On the other hand, I instinctively used【Dimensional Step】to transfer behind another one of the dragon flies that had launched an attack at me. Fortunately, the river and its banks were

not affected by the fog, so I was safely able to transfer behind the dragon fly.

Due to taking a fixed distance after the transfer, I was able to rearrange my stance.

I don't hate insects in particular, but in the past, a cockroach flew into my clothes, clinging onto it; the trauma shouldered from back then had since come to the point of me having unpleasant feelings towards insects by reflex.

I pulled the sword from my waist in one go and cut down the dragonfly that was approaching. The sword blade filled with a pale blue brilliance as I brandished it sideways, splitting the huge dragonfly right in half. Its body fell to the ground, while its wings that was filled with resilient vitality flapped noisily above the gravel of the river beach as it crawled about. While crushing it underfoot, I swung my sword at the rest of the dragonflies remaining in the air.

Before long, the dragonflies judged that they were at a disadvantage and scattered upstream, with the unpleasant hum of their wings disappearing in the vicinity.

On the bank of the river, only the sounds of flowing water and the rustling of leaves from the many trees along it, riding upon the winds, could be heard.

After carefully wiping away the insects' bodily fluids off her sword and sheathing it, she turned around to face me and called out while approaching.

"Seems that the riverside isn't affected by the fog. If that's the case, we can travel downstream in one go."

Nodding at her suggestion, and after confirming that Ariane was holding onto my shoulder, I invoked【Dimensional Step】to move downstream the Riburuto River,

The area surrounding us became clear as the fog gave way to the rising sun.

Around noon, I took a break for a short while from using transfer magic to move downstream so that we could enjoy the lunch that Glenys made for us.

Soon after, around when the sun began to decline, a mountain range to the right appeared ahead, seeming surprisingly large. The mountain range seemed to match the one that I've heard about called the Annette Mountain Range.

On the eastern side of the mountain range was the elven village Darutowa.

The outward appearance was roughly the same as Ariane's birthplace, Raratoia, with only a few differences. The main difference being that there was a large moat filled with water from the nearby river that surrounded the village's walls and a drawbridge connected to the entrance. The bridge was raised at the moment, preventing anyone from approaching the village.

There was a small plaza in front of the village's entrance, a place in which some similar

mushroom-shaped buildings like those seen in Raratoia were built.

Ariane didn't seem to have particularly strong feelings for the landscape as she stood in front of the drawbridge and called out to the elves who were stationed in the watchtower.

"My name is Ariane Glenys Mable! I am heading towards a human town for a mission! I wish to borrow a cottage for the night!"

After her greetings, a man in the watchtower gave a fleeting glance in our direction. After talking about something to another person, the man responded to Ariane from across the moat.

"I welcome you! Your dinner will be prepared in the village! Please use whichever guest cottage you like!

Upon receiving that answer, Ariane lowered her head before turning her heel and returning to my side.

"We'll stay in a cottage here for tonight. Tomorrow morning, once we advance through the forest west of here, the Rhoden Kingdom's city named Cellist should appear."

"Hrm, finally. We've traveled quite a distance."

"Honestly, if you came here from Raratoia it would normally take four days by walking…"

While I follow behind Ariane as she picked out a hut, I was able to hear the slight amazement in her voice.

The flat mushroom-shaped hut she choose was comparatively larger than the others, with a thick support pillar at the center and a kitchen with a stone floor in the interior that also had a fireplace. A table and chairs for four were to the left of the pillar, while on the right by the window were four beds, with none of the other furnitures standing out.

When I placed my baggage down near the pillar and sat down on a bed, Ponta who was enshrined on top of my helmet got off, walking around with a petapeta as she checked the room. After Ponta lifted her paw, she tilted her head in confusion as she stared at the distinct pawprints she had left behind.

It appeared that this cottage probably hasn't been maintained or cleaned in a while.

I opened the window fully and flapped the blanket on the bed to clear out the dust, sending them into the air. Trying to drive away the dusty air, Ponta's magic created a whirlwind in the room, but it only caused all the more dust to envelop.

"Cough, cough! …Since I have to go meet with Darutowa's elder, could you do something about this dust in the meantime?"

Ariane covered her mouth with her hand while looking up, displaying a magnificent grimace.

“Mhm. I’ll arrange it so that we can actually sleep on the beds.”

With an exaggerated nod, I took on the role as caretaker.

After Ariane left, I gave the hut another once over. I found a broom hanging beside the fireplace, and began using it to sweep the floor, dusting from start to end.

Once the dust had been cleared from the hut, I took a wooden pail and rag from the corner of the room outside with me. The sky was already dyed almost a crimson red, while the forest was turning into a deep black.

I tried searching in the cabin’s surroundings for a well but couldn’t find one, so I decided to use the water from the moat instead. In fact, there was a stairway leading to the surface of water, so I drew from there.

I returned to the hut with the wooden bucket, and wringed the rag dipped in water. By the time I was finished wiping down the table and chairs, the inside of the cabin was changed more or less into a rather relaxing space.

“Hrm, something like this…”

I crossed my arms over my chest after I threw away the dirtied water from the wooden pail outside the cottage.

Thereupon, the drawbridge in front of Darutowa’s gate lowered as Ariane made her way back. She was carrying a covered pot and what seemed to be a cloth basket in her hands.

“I got tonight’s dinner.”

She declared while showing the items that she held, her lilac cheeks flushing slightly with a tinge of red as she showed a smile with her coquettish lips. Furthermore, her white hair carrying traces of moisture fluttered in the wind, while a faint flowery fragrance drifted upon the breeze.

“D-did you just get out of a bath, by any chance!?”

In response to my tone that was much louder than usual, she nodded wide eyed in affirmation.

“Didn’t you use the one in my parent’s home in Raratoia? Humans don’t seem to have the habit of taking too many baths.”

“What!? There was a bath in Raratoia…regrettable…”

Ariane’s shocking words led to me unabashedly displaying my lowered head, while she tilted her head to one side, watching the strange scene with a discerning eye.

After coming to a different world, I have yet to take a proper bath. Still, because of this skeletal body, I couldn’t carelessly expose myself to other people.

Unexpectedly there was a bath in a residence in Raratoia…I didn't notice at all.

I feel like cursing myself for my own carelessness.

"…Do you perhaps want to take a bath?"

"Mhm."

"…Is there even any meaning of taking a bath with a skeletal body?"

"Impertinence! I was fond of cleanliness since the time I had a human body!"

My protests were lightly brushed aside with a "Let's go and have our meal already". After letting out a curt cry of approval, Ponta followed Ariane back to the cottage.

Losing the democratic vote, I reluctantly returned to the cottage.

Ariane held a covered pot filled with bean and bacon soup, while the wrapped basket contained bread and some type of red fruit inside.

While she was pouring soup into a bowl, I surveyed the room once more, but the thing I was looking for didn't appear in my sight.

"…This cottage doesn't have a bath."

"It can't be helped. Originally, this cottage was built for the purpose of housing humans who had lost their way around here."

Towards my complaint, Ariane answered while feeding a piece of fruit to Ponta.

Fifty kilometres west from here was Rhoden Kingdom's town, Cellist, while thirty kilometres south was the Archduchy of Rinburuto, so the likelihood of a human being chased by a monster and losing their way was high. Due to those circumstances, this cottage was built only to temporarily house lost humans.

As a result, the cottage only had minimum facilities left behind; there weren't even the crystal lamps like those in the elven houses here.

Only an oil lamp, which acted as a sorry excuse for light, was on the table, producing an unreliable light source.

–If I had stayed in Raratoia, at this time I could have taken a bath…

While the salty taste of the bacon and bean soup entered my mouth, the trip's new objective was engraved into my mind.

Chapter 7:「Troublesome Things」Part 1

We left the cottage early the following day and headed west of the Annette mountain range. The forest was full of the same fog from yesterday, so we continued our journey on foot.

Occasionally, a monster would bare its fangs and attack, but rather than being a threat they only managed to slow our pace.

Eventually, the sun started to rise and the fog began to clear, which allowed our speed to increase once transfer magic became usable.

But, the true worth of the transfer magic has not been shown on this journey, and the sun was already firmly seating in the west by the time Cellist came into view.

The city was about the same as the first city I visited, Rubierute. The city's surrounding fields included a variety of other crops besides wheat, and a simple trench and earthen wall had been built in the direction of the forest to prevent monster attacks.

On the way to Cellist, Ariane used her cloak to conceal her lilac skin and pointy ears which were the characteristics of dark elves. While I on the other attract as much attention as a knight wearing a black cloak would. On multiple occasions, farmers would stop their work and glance in my direction.

We quietly walked up to Cellist and paid the entrance fee to the two guards before entering the city.

"We should first find an inn to spend the night……"

"You're right."

Ariane replied to my voiced thoughts and began to look around the city. Since it had been night when we snuck into Diento, it was a little unusual to be in a human city in daylight.

Before closing for the night, there were still merchants, and the city was full of miscellaneous sounds as the crowds passed by.

Ponta sat comfortably underneath my black cloak as the crowd naturally parted ways as we approached.

After walking the streets for a while, we came across a group of people wearing leather and metal armor similar to myself standing in front of a certain building. The familiar signboard of the adventurer's association hung above the entrance.

The group of armed adventurers were gathered around another adventure who seemed to have garnered the group's respect.

The booming voices of the men managed to cut through the street noise and I was able to

pick up parts of the conversation.

I lower my walking speed when some of the contents caught my attention.

“Was that how it really happened?”

“No～, at least it didn’t appear like that to me.”

A rather tall man with a stubby beard, who was equipped with full-body armor and a large round shield was questioning the young man in front of him. The youth in the question was rather slender, was adorned in leather armor and carried a bow on his back. He exaggeratedly threw his shoulders back as he shook his head to express that he didn’t have an answer.

“One of our scouts came across one of them and it immediately ran away.”

“That’s the tenth one in the last seven days～, it’d be troublesome if a group of them happen to show up.”

“Ah, well they can’t fight if their numbers are too small. Even if traps are set they’ll only snare the dimwitted ones, so it’ll still be a headache.”

“Since the subjugation request for the Haunting wolves has already been sent to us, it’s only a matter of time before the feudal lord’s forces are dispatched.”

When she heard the exchange between the two, Ariane lifted her head in response to something that had been said.

According to the adventures’ conversation, a dangerous group of monsters had appeared in the forest at the base of the Annette mountain range, and an urgent quest had been sent out for the subjugation of them, at least that was the gist of it.

Judging by the number of adventurers that had been mobilized, the monsters called Haunting Wolves must be a considerable menace.

My only concern was the emergency summons that had been handed down to the adventurers. When you thought about it carefully, all active adventures would be summoned by the emergency call.

The people that were still talking were probably adventures stationed in this city, and whenever there was a sufficient threat the feudal lord had the right to conscript adventurers into active duty……

—Perhaps it would be better to avoid carelessly using my adventurer’s identification card to enter cities.

While I was in the midst of thinking about my future as an adventurer, I felt someone tugging at the back of my cloak, so I stopped and turned my attention towards Ariane since

she was the one doing it.

Ponta seemed to notice that I'd stopped walking as she tilted her head and looked down from atop my helmet.

"Arc, I'd like to talk to you about something…… After we arrive at the inn would be alright."

"Hum, alright. Let's find an inn right away."

In accordance with her desire, we searched till we found an inn to enter.

We rented two rooms on the second floor and after receiving the keys from the hostess, I handed one to Ariane.

After taking the key, she lifted her bag and went up the stairs.

After seeing her back disappear, I asked the hostess for directions to our next destination, Hoban.

"Madam, would you happen to know the way to Hoban?"

"Yada yade, Knight-sama.To be called a madam, you're making me feel shy. It's truly embarrassing!"

She shook her voluptuous body and voiced a big laughed once she was done speaking, and honestly, she reminded me of a neighborhood aunty.

"Ah, Hoban was it? If you follow the highway that's beside the forest after leaving through the southern gate, it should be a two day trip by carriage? The confident ones seem to take a shortcut through the forest, but It's better that you don't take that option."

"The Haunting Wolves……?"

"That's right! There've even been rumors that more than ten people went missing in the last seven days. It isn't unusual for monsters to appear in the forest around here, since they seem to come down from Annette mountains, but this is a troublesome matter."

The hostess let out a sigh as her shoulders sunk,

The haunting wolves probably appeared along the highway and attacked travelers and merchants alike; rumors surely spread and the number of visitors to Cellist gradually decreased.

With no other option, the feudal lord sent out the emergency subjugation request to the adventurers. While the adventurers were enthusiastic about the high-value fur, it seems that things have not been going well.

I heard these things during my chat with the hostess before I decided to retreat to my room.

I sat my luggage beside the bed before removing my cloak and laying down. Ponta, on the other hand, used her magic to fly to the windowsill where she curled up and looked outside.

Shortly after, Ariane announced her presence with a knock before she entered the room.

She still had her gray cloak on when she entered the room, and she only removed the hood once the door was completely closed; shaking her snow-white hair to arrange it properly.

Her lilac skin was exposed, yet her usually strong-willed golden eyes seemed a little gloomy as she looked at me.

Her expression showed that she was worried about something, yet I said nothing and simply waited for her to start.

"……Arc, can we stop by the edge of the forest tomorrow?"

After a period of silence, she asked such a request.

"Hum? We'd reach Hoban if we follow the highway out of the south gate, but I was told it'd be quicker if we cut through the southwest forest…… but that's not your reason is it?"

She nodded at my question before quietly speaking her purpose.

"It has to do with the Haunting Wolves that the adventures spoke of while ago…… I would like to acquire one of their tails if possible…… Could we make a little detour tomorrow?"

"According to our arrangement I am to help Ariane-dono in her endeavours. If you say that a wolf's tail is important, then I'm willing to cooperate."

I gave an exaggerated nod to show that I was willing to comply with her wishes as the person in question had an awkward expression while her cheeks turned a deep shade of scarlet.

The usual bewitching smile and energetic disposition were blown away as she came to give her『Request』, and she still seemed out of it as she offered her reasoning.

"……In fact, it seems like my onee-sama will be married soon, so I was thinking of sending her a veil made out of haunting wolves' tails……"

Her expression turned a little lonely as she spoke of her circumstances with her older sister.

According to her, the tail of the haunting wolf emits a dark blue light and said tail could be weaved into a glowing blue veil, which was a rather expensive present.

However, the tail of the haunting wolf was a rather difficult to obtain because the wolves were able to create multiple illusions of themselves, making it difficult to find the real one during battle.

—A monster capable using the shadow clone jutsu……

Alone, Ariane would be able to deal with a single one of them, but this was a monster that hunted in packs, which meant there would be multiple adversaries.

Since this request of hers wasn't related to the rescue of the elves, she was conflicted because the normally unattainable material was right before her eyes.

Her only motivation was to give her older sister a gift, there was no other reason. Taking into account the strength of the monsters, she couldn't afford to be careless when dealing with them.

"Well, we'll be able to reach Hoban by tomorrow if we cut through the forest at the base of the Annetta mountain range."

"Thank you, Arc."

With tomorrow's plan set, the blush on her lilac skin lessened and she offered me small thanks. I would've liked to see her embarrassed face a bit more, but she was staring back at me with the usual strength in her eyes, so I left it at that.

"Then let us go and buy dinner…… and some preserved food for tomorrow."

"Kyun!"

Ponta, who had been looking out the window until now, let out a cry when she heard me mutter about food in preparation for tomorrow. She used her wind magic to fly onto my face before climbing onto my helmet.

As we walked down the street into the sunset, I really wondered how Ponta was able to understand human speech.

Chapter 8:「Troublesome Things」Part 2

The following day, we left the inn in Cellist early morning and entered the forest via the south gate.

We originally took the highway along the forest before taking the southwest detour that leads to Mt. Parnassus. Normally you'd need a compass to safely navigate the forest; however, that was only if you weren't accompanied one of the forest people as Ariane did not waver as she advanced.

A thin layer of magic obstructing fog covered the Canada forest, making【Dimensional Step】unusable.

Even without the fog, there would be no opportunity to show the value of transfer magic as the vegetation thickened the farther we penetrated into the forest's depths.

Like I thought, the forest on this side of Riburuto river is vastly different from the great Canada forest. After all, the great Canada forest is an ancient forest that spreads out from the large old trees in the center.

I passed the time searching the forest for a potential location to use【Dimensional Step】

Around noon, we found a suitable place to rest and enjoyed the preserved food we bought in Cellist yesterday.

The meal consisted of jerky, smoked potatoes, dried apples and walnuts. All of it went for around three silver coins, but the dried apples alone had cost one silver coin. However, since the leather pouches in my luggage bag contained more than one thousand gold coins each, it wasn't that big of a deal.. Instead I'm more troubled by the fact that we've only had to cover the inn charges and food so far.

Ever since we bought the apples, Ponta had been shaking her tail back and forth and was staring quite intensely at them.

When I started dangling the fruit in front of Ponta, Ariana properly scolded me saying "This is pathetic"

While Ponta was ecstatically eating her dried apple, I petted her and ate my own meal.

I tried to used【Flame】to warm up my smoked potato, but it seems the heat was too high because the potato was reduced to a lump of coal in my hand. Ariane must have skillfully used her spirit magic to warm up her potato because she was triumphantly eating hers next to me.

The thought of practicing to control my magic output crossed my mind as I gnawed on my burnt potato.

Once lunch came to an end, we resumed our trek through the forest under Ariane's

guidance.

Only Ponta was not in her usual spot since she was currently taking a nap while being held between Ariane's ample bosom. In many ways, it was an enviable situation.

When I started to wonder how long we had already trekked through the forest, it dawned on me that the birds' chirping and the howls of other animals had ceased, leaving only the rustle of the leaves to break the silence.

When they noticed the situation, Ariane lowered her baggage while Ponta coiled herself around her neck. Even though she was still half asleep, Ponta still managed to ensure that she would not fall off.

However, now is not the time to leisurely comment on such things.

Dropping my luggage bag, I move the Saint Thunder sword to my waist and draw it while simultaneously grabbing the Shield of Titus with my other hand. The sound of rapidly approaching footsteps began to mix in with the sound of the rustling leaves.

They were approaching at a rapid speed from every direction.

In order to cover our blind spots Ariane and I stood back-to-back with each other

For an instant, the undergrowth shook before a pack of large white wolves leaped out.

The wolves were two meters long from head to tail and they were baring their fangs in our direction.

When one of the wolves leaped at me I use my sword to cut it in two, but I didn't feel any resistance at all. Instead, the body of the wolf I cut down completely dissipated, and a new white wolf appeared in its place.

"What!?"

While I was caught off guard, the white wolf managed to get past the range of my sword, thrusting its head forward for a bite. As I took a step back to regain my balances the wolf suddenly started to howl.

"Garruuu!!"

While I tried to regain my balance, I felt a large shock from the hand that I held my shield in as two white wolves threw themselves at it.

I bash the wolves with the shield, but just like before they dissipated, so the only thing achieved was a wide swing. While I was preoccupied, a wolf used the opportunity to bite at my sword hand, frantically trying to rip my arm off.

However, my arm was protected by Saint Armor of Belen so I felt no pain at all, and the wolf quickly tired of this futile endeavor.

I throw out the arm with the wolf on it, sending the wolf flying into the air before slashing the falling wolf with my sword.

However, it seems I put a little too much power into it because my light slash removed one of the wolf's fore-paws with a large spray of blood.

The surrounding illusions and wolves simultaneously took a step back, so I took this chance to begin my counterattack by casting【Flame】from the tip of my sword.

A stream of flames similar to a flamethrower appeared, rapidly increasing in temperature and the surrounding area was charred black.

I had already used【Dimensional step】to transfer next to the beast and plunge my sword into its heart. Because the real wolves responded faster than the illusions, it was easy to distinguish the real ones from the rest of them. Seems like an unexpected weakness had been revealed.

When I looked back, I saw Ariane was surrounded by a group of illusions and wolves, but she seemed to be able to handle herself just fine. She used her spirit magic to create an elevated foothold and surrounded herself with a ring of flames, which guaranteed that they would be injured with every charge.

One of the wolves had a gouged-out eye and a missing leg, which rendered it unable to move. The other wolves had also suffered injuries because I could see red streaks in their fur

As you'd expect from someone trained as a soldier, she was able to fight well even for extended periods of time. On the other hand, I simply took advantage of my high physical prowess; however, it's rather tricky to apply my prowess in this battle.

Though the problem could have been settled with ranged attacks, ever since I've come to this world I hardly tried using my magic skills. If I used them recklessly then there's no telling how much damage I could cause.

However, this was a perfect opportunity—

Believing it to be a clever idea, I looked beyond the group of wolves before me.

There was a rather large wolf behind them that had yet to join the battle. Each time I attack it would retreat, seeming content with observing the situation from the back.

While calmly observing the battle, the boss wolf uttered a cry.

Some of the boss's subordinates moved into a visibly different formation.

The game is afoot.

"Come!"

Setting my glaze besides the boss wolf, I cast the【Flame】spell and followed it up

with【Dimensional step】.

In an instant my form disappeared, causing the boss wolf and his group to tense up.

The moment I was beside the boss wolf, I took a swing with my sword.

However, the boss's instincts were rather sharp as it was able to instantly dodge my attack. But I was not going to let it escape, so I used【Dimensional step】to travel in the direction the boss dodged.

Since the boss was in the middle of dodging it was carried by the law of inertia rather than its own legs. I raise my sword and bring it down on the wolf in question.

When the boss saw that I had transferred, it tried to twist its body in mid-air, but it was to late as the sword had already pierced its neck, and blood began to flow from its throat.

The spray of blood splattered across the ground. I glanced at the bloody soil before transferring back to Ariane's back.

While I had my sword up ready to continue the fight, all of a sudden the wolves stopped moving.

The next moment all of the wolves turned tail and ran.

The scene of their abrupt retreat left me dumbfounded, but Ariane's call helped me regain my senses.

"Arc! I need at least one more of them!!"

"Got it!"

With a brief reply, I return my shield to my back and fire【Rock Bullet】in the direction of the fleeing wolves.

The rock hit the ground and kicked up some dust in front of one of the wolves, causing it to stop in its tracks.

"【Dimensional Step】!"

Casting the spell, I transferred behind the stopped wolf and cut off its hind-legs.

The wolf let out a pained cry as it fell to the ground, and I followed up by stabbing my sword into its neck. As I cut into the wolf's neck, a「Gari」sound spread through the area as the wolf breathed it's last.

It seems that I was able to capture the third wolf that Ariane had hoped for.

Still this fight had given me many things to reflect upon.

I needed to practice my fighting techniques a little more. While my mind has an abundant amount of game skills and strategies, I tend to fight in a rather linear manner.

Unlike a certain blue cat robot, I couldn't simply pull secret tools out of nowhere and laugh off emergency situations.

I let out a sigh in my heart while thinking things over, as Ariane sheathed her sword and walked over.

One of the white wolves laid at her feet.

"Thank you, Arc! I don't think I'd have been able to secure three Haunting Wolves alone! With this, I will be able to give my onee-san a good present."

I was momentarily blinded by Ariane's dazzling smile as she thanked me.

My reaction must've puzzled her, because she tilted her head.

Clearing my throat a little, I tried changing the topic by asking her a question.

"So are these really Haunting Wolves? Their tails don't seem to emit much light……"

While I was speaking, I looked at the tail of one of the haunting wolves and noticed that it was emitting a slight shine.

"That's because this forest doesn't contain much mana. The tails will emit a pure blue light once they are taken into the Canada forest."

She knelt down and inspected the tails while she spoke. Once she was certain that the battle had ended, Ponta uncoiled herself from Ariane 's neck and shook out her fur.

"Arc, I'm sorry but could you use【Transfer Gate】to send these back to Raratoia?"

"Hmm, I don't really mind, but……"

I looked around as before I continued to speak

"If I use【Transfer Gate】here, we'll have to go back to Cellist before we can travel to Hoban again. That's the closest place with easily memorizable features."

While【Transfer Gate】was a long-distance transfer magic, it was a spell that could only connect to places that the user can clearly visualize. Since the scenery of the surrounding forest was rather ordinary, I couldn't set a clear transfer destination.

"Then, while I bleed out the Haunting wolves and collect the tails, could you go search for a more suitable place to transfer to, Arc?"

"Well, I suppose it will eliminate future troubles…… I'll search around the edge of the forest for a while."

I pick up the cloak I had threw on the ground and dusted it off before putting it back over my shoulders.

Sensing the changed atmosphere, Ponta hopped from Ariane's shoulder to the top of my helmet. Seems like we'll be doing this together.

For now, let's search the terrain for a structure or marker that can be set as a return point for【Transfer Gate】.

If I simply wandered around the forest, I wouldn't be able to find my way back to Ariane, so I picked a direction and traveled straight ahead.

Occasionally using【Dimensional Step】, I looked around for a suitable location.

However, there was no suitable place since the only things I found were just more trees, rocks, and dirt.

Ever once in awhile I would spot a bloodstain in the undergrowth. That, and the paw prints on the ground, probably meant that the Haunting Wolves had gone in this direction.

Since I was traveling at a considerable speed, it might not be long before I catch up or even surpass them.

When I look at the sky through the tree branches, I saw that gray clouds were filling the sky, causing darkness to permeate the forest.

When I looked back, I could no longer recognize the forest's scenery or locate Ariane's figure at all.

While I had been looking for an appropriate location, I would occasionally break off a branch and stick it into the ground. If I made the amateur mistake of not marking my path while searching for a transfer location, I would have lost my way the instant I started.

Ponta would cry out from atop my helmet whenever she found some forest nuts. If I tried to follow Ponta's directions, I'd have immediately lost my way.

While soothing Ponta, I suddenly heard a someone's voice.

I stopped and listened to my surroundings.

The sounds of rustling leaves, animals barking at something and humans were carried on the wind.

The origin of the human sounds were only a short distance away from the path I was on. I'd have to mark my current location here if I decided to take the detour.

I broke a few branches and create a flashy circular marker out of them.

I can't afford to waver here.

Putting Ponta back on my head, I turned in the direction of the life signs.

There's a chance that this path could lead to an inhabited building, so with that thought in my mind, I double-time it.

Eventually, the sounds carried by the wind began to grow louder.

However, rather than the sound of people working, it was the sound of fighting.

The screams of people have emanated from the forest ahead as the unpleasant smells of blood and burnt objects began to fill the air.

Ponta sensed the unpleasant atmosphere and wrapped herself around my neck while I took a deep breath and took a hesitant step in the direction of the fight.

Chapter 9:「How Unreasonable」

The forest path wasn't that wide; there was a ravine to the left, and the thick-rooted trees were set at an incline making it difficult to see beyond the thicket.

On such a road a large, black, four horse carriage was advancing at a brisk pace.

The carriage had a rather frugal design, but the eyes of a craftsman would have been able to see the finer details of the carriage and judge it to belong to a noble.

Horse-backed knights surrounded the large, black carriage as it traveled along. In combination with the soldiers following behind, there was a total of fifty people protecting the carriage.

Each of them was wearing matching sets of equipment and skillfully advanced without any wasteful movements.

Parallel to the carriage was a horse more excellent than the rest, and the rider was adorned in a prominent set of armor.

The young man, who had neatly combed back hair and a square jaw, was carefully surveying the surrounding area.

This man was a member of one of the seven dukes families of Rhoden, the legitimate heir of the Frivetran family, Lendl Do Frivetran. And he was currently commander of the black carriage's guards.

Considering the noble riding in the carriage, even such an amount of guards could be considered too little. However, if their numbers were any greater speed would've had to have been sacrificed, and since time was of the essence there was no choice but to use fewer people on this expedition.

The purpose of this journey was to get the occupant of the carriage to a secret rendezvous in the Rinburuto Arch Dukedom, so the major towns controlled by lords had to be avoided. Therefore, a different path than the faster highway had been chosen.

On such a path one had to be vigilant of unexpected monster and bandit attacks, so the fifty men present were selected as the best of the best.

Despite that, Lord Lendil wasn't careless in his duties and had everyone maintain their current speed since the last day and a half.

Inside the carriage, a young lady was gazing out of the window at the forest and the gray clouds overhead while letting out a sigh.

This sixteen-year-old girl still had a youthful appearance despite being the second princess of the Rhoden kingdom, yet she carried a ladylike atmosphere.

Juliana tried to calmed herself down by playing with a lock of her dark blonde hair. Her maid, who was ready in waiting with a basket of confectioneries, called out to the princess.

“Juliana-sama, would you like something to eat in order to calm your nerves? Are you perhaps a little anxious about this visit to Rinburuto?”

Juliana’s childhood friend and personal maid, Feruna, offered a genuine smile as the princess shook her in refusal with a troubled expression.

“Even though this latest visit has been kept secret, I can’t shake this uneasy feeling. Our current speed and distance from our destination should prevent any pursuers from catching us, but……”

While the two were talking, the sky outside the carriage darkened to the point where rainfall seemed to be imminent. A vague feeling of unease swirled within her chest, as she looked up at the sky before shutting her eyes once her view started to blur.

At that moment, in front of the carriage— screams and shout resounded as the frontline was fired upon.

“Enemy attack!!!”

Besides the carriage, Lendi immediately took command of the unit and ordered them to to be on high alert as the group was reorganized.

The unit acted as one under their leader’s commands and took up a tighter defensive formation with determination in their hearts.

Lendi took the front most position and glared at the enemies in front of them.

Even after leaving the capital in secret, and traveling at breakneck speeds, an ambush had been set up in advance. There were only a small number of reasons that could explain this situation.

Lendi felt irritation at himself because this happened, but now was not the time to let such thoughts cloud his mind.

At a glance it was clear that the attackers weren’t simple bandits, so they must have been sent by either the first or second prince factions. Multiple【Flame Bullets】from the fire school of magic were simultaneously cast to attack the unit.

The was no way that simple thieves would be in possession of more than one person capable of using magic.

“The enemies are magicians! Stop their chants! Knights with mithril shields step forward!”

A group of knights readied their shields as they stepped forward while the rearguard began to notch their arrows. All of a sudden something made its way through the unit and managed

to hit a member of the rearguard that had been pulling back an arrow.

Screams and unrest ran through the soldiers at the sudden surprise attack, so Lendi tried to rebuild morale with a thundering cry.

Fortunately, the arrow was shot from the depths of the forest, so it had been fired at a vertical incline and only managed to hit a soldier on the end of the row.

Almost a hundred people appeared from the depths of the forest. While they had the appearance of thieves, their movements were those of trained mercenaries.

“Units 1-3 fall back into a tighter defensive formation! Don’t let any scoundrels approach!! Everyone else form a line in front of the carriage! Protect it by any means!!”

The units started splitting as commanded.

They were at a numerical disadvantage, and due to the threat of powerful magic attacks, the only viable strategy was a forward charge to get the carriage through the blockade.

However, the movements of some of the soldier were duller than usual, causing a delay in the formation’s construction.

While the guards struggled to form into two squads, the mercenary leader in the rear twisted his lips into an amused sneer.

“Fire the arrows once more!”

When the man gave his order, men with bows simultaneously notched their arrows.

As the arrows were fired, the knights and soldiers formed a shield defensive formation around the carriage preventing any fatal wound from being inflicted.

However, the soldiers that received the volley and suffered injuries had clearly lost some mobility and it was certain that the formation would crumble without perfect cooperation.

“Shave away the defenses!! Our goal is the princess’s life!!!”

At the man’s second order, the hundred bandit-like men gave a high-spirited shout as they broke into a dead run. The guards desperately tried to maintain formation as they collided with the mercenaries on this small forest path.

As the movements of the guard grew duller, they started to fall one after another and they no longer looked like the elites that had been selected to guard the princess.

“Cox-sama, are the poor movements of the guards your doing?”

The leader of the mercenaries was called out by a stump of a man that was dressed in the grubs of a priest. At the divested state of the guardsmen, the little man floated a smile unbefitting clergymen as his associate answered his question.

“Bishop Borane, the secret lies within this ”

The little clergyman called Bishop Borane had raven colored hair atop his head, a stubby beard, sharp eyes, and a vulgar smile more fitting for a thief than a priest.

But, the sword at his waist and the pristine leather armor wrapped around his body were articles that bandits could never possess.

Bishop Borane received an arrow that the man had held out.

The man name was Cox Carlo De Brutus.

He was heir to the Brutus Dukedom of the Rhoden’s several Duke families and was following the strategy his father, a member of the first prince’s faction, had outlined to him.

The arrow which had been handed to him appeared to be an ordinary arrow to bishop Borane, so he glanced at Cox in order to hear his purpose.

“You see, the arrowheads are dipped in poison. However, the Giant Basilisk poison used is a rather hard commodity to come by. While it can’t deliver instantaneous death, it ensures that even the movement of elite soldiers will be dulled.”

When Cox revealed the secret, Barone’s expression reflected genuine amusement.

“Haha! Cox-sama seems to be well prepared.”

“These only became available a few days ago. Since there was little time only a small number could be prepared, so once we return I’ll be sure to prepare more.

As the two chatted and laughed, they focused their attention on the collapse of the defensive formation and the man desperately trying to get the get the carriage to move forward.

Lendl, the commander of the guards of said carriage, glanced at the collapsed figures of his men and could only curse the current situation.

The reason being that he never imagined that the rear of the defensive formation would collapse.

The enemy magicians from a while ago now used the opportunity to push the mithril-shielded knights back. However, the magicians fell back as the ambush squad of nearly 50 men closed in.

In no time at all the rear had completely collapsed, leaving the guards little time to act.

“All remaining knights, prepare your『Explosive magic crystals 』!!”

The knights that had been blocking the magicians’ assault and the ones that had been fighting off the enemies on the front-line sheathed their weapons and pulled a sphere from a

pouch on their waists.

When the enemy saw this strange behavior their eyes bulged as they tried to rush the presumably retreating group, resulting in the path being blocked up and preventing them from seeing beyond the backs of those in front of them.

“Bayataroo!! Withdraw!! Withdraw!!”

That holler was raised as the enemy tried to back paddle when they saw what Lendl was holding in their direction.

“Fire!!!!”

『Explode. Slay thine enemies–』

At Lendl’s command, the knights grasped the sphere in their hands and simultaneously spoke the activation phrase for the magic tools.

Then they proceeded to throw the spheres in an arc causing them to land right if front of the enemy’s main formation. A moment later an earsplitting sound and explosion rocked the area and blew away a few enemies.

The front of the formation fell apart, leaving the magicians defenseless as Lendl took the opportunity to ride his horse through the opening.

“Breakthrough at one point! Position yourselves in front of the carriage!! Follow my lead!!!”

When Lendl gave the order, he gripped his horse’s neck and lead the battle charge.

Even with the enemy firing【Fire Bullets】and【Rock Bullets】, he skillfully plunged into the enemy forces with a mithril shield and a sword in hand.

While cutting down his opponents from atop his horse, the knights behind him followed suit.

When a hole began to form in the enemy line a【Fire Bullet】struck the ground in front of Lendl’s horse causing it to scream and fall, throwing Lendl off in the process.

The knight behind Lendl’s falling horse quickly moved out of the way, as the enemies descended on the fallen beast and thrust their swords into its stomach and throat.

Lendl tried to rise after he’d been thrown off, but his broken leg prevented him from standing.

A man that held a short spear in front of the struggling Lendl offered him a vulgar smile as he thrust his spear into Lendl’s stomach.

“Guha!!”

While coughing up blood, Lendl desperately tried to maintain concussions as he held his hand over his wound and looked back at the carriage that held the master he should be protecting. His eyes reflected only death, as a large thief-pretender forcefully threw the carriage door open.

The man that opened the door had a bloody sword in hand, and was trying to take a swing at the maid that rushed from the carriage with a dagger in hand. Panicked, the man blocked it with his left arm.

The dagger deeply penetrated the man's left arm, and in his anger he hit the maid using his full strength.

"Fucking woman!!"

The maid Feruna's body and face suffered the full blunt of the man's assault causing her to fall down on the spot unable to move.

The man pulled out the dagger that had been stuck in his arm and forcibly stabbed his sword into Feruna's chest.

"Gaha!"

Her consciousness quickly faded away as blood began to pool inside the carriage. The man proceeded to kick the maid out of the way.

"Noooooooo!!!! Ferunaaaaaaaa!!!"

At the death of her childhood friend and maid, Juliana didn't care that her luxurious dress was soiled when she tried to cradle Feruna's body.

However, she was impaled by the man when he stabbed the sword still covered in Feruna's blood into Juliana's chest.

Juliana's expression was one of confusion, her eyes continued to bulge while the sword sunk deeper into her chest.

Her face took on a teary eyed and agonized expression, her voice refused to leave her lips and only blood managed to come out.

Before long, her limbs lost all of their strength and she hung on the wall of the carriage, a haziness began to seep into the princess's mind and the passion reflected in her eyes started to flicker out.

After the man glanced at his handiwork, he pulled the sword from the girl's chest and wiped the blood off with the princess's dress before sheathing it. He then carefully removed a necklace that hung from the princess's neck.

He exited the carriage with the necklace as if it were something important.

As the guard's last resistance began to be snuffed out, this situation was reaching its conclusion.

Coming from behind, Cox observed the last few survivor of the guard detail before issuing orders.

"Alright start acting like bandits! The valuables you take will be added to your reward!"

At his order, the soldiers dressed as bandits let out joyous shouts as they began to strip the guards of all of their valuables and weapons.

While looking at the soldiers with a bit of envy, Cox addressed the small man standing next to him, who appeared to be restless for some reason.

"Bishop Borane, is everything alright?"

"I-Is that so? No, I'll take you word on it……"

As Bishop Borane was watching the men prepare to search for loot, a joyful expression appeared on his face. Standing next to the bishop, he could only mutter silently "How vulgar" to himself.

"Cox-sama, the keepsake of her highness Juliana."

While Cox was speaking with such venom, the large man responsible for killing the princess approached and quietly spoke up.

The man respectfully knelt down when he presented the necklace that he had taken from the princess's neck a few moments ago.

"Tiresome. The princess was such disappointing being…… However, to bring along magic explosive crystals. The damages to our side were considerably heavier thanks to that."

Upon receiving the necklace from his subordinate, Cox's lips twisted into an amused smile.

The necklace was one of the two items that the late queen sent to her daughters. At the center was a large jewel entwined in a golden flower and the band was studded with smaller gems.

The necklace was carefully wrapped in a silken cloth and put in his breast pocket. However, just as Cox was about to give the signal to withdraw.

""Gyaaaaaaaaaa!!!!""

A death cry rang out in the general area where the soldiers collected their war trophies.

When Cox turned in the direction of the screams, he saw a group of large white wolves jumping out of the forest, and his terrified subordinates scattering in all directions.

No, the sight before him was that of humans becoming the prey.

The wolves growled excessively, giving the surrounding men a close up view of their fangs before they went in for a bite.

Although they were over two meters tall, the wolves were rather agile, and their fangs and strong jaws would be the end of any soldier that acted carelessly.

The magicians tried to fight back using magic, but the wolves detected the danger and before long nearly all the magicians had been torn to shreds.

Those who tried to fight them off with swords found that the wolves' bodies dispersed when they were fatally injured before the soldiers heads were torn off from behind.

The people that sent Juliana's group to hell a little while ago were now dragged into a hell of their own, and Cox could only stare in shock.

"Haunting Wolves……:

The large man beside Cox spoke the name of hell's messengers in utter amazement.

Hearing the monsters' name cause Cox mind to start back up and he started to give out orders.

"All troops withdraw!!! Regroup at the rendezvous site!!! Heavy knight units, raise your shields and toss away all other supplies!! Release the horse as decoys!!"

The soldiers that heard the orders retreated as fast as possible.

The heavy knight unit dismounted and removed their luggage from their horses. After whipping the sides of the horses, the knights took out a shield from their bags. To increase the speed of the retreat, the small number of people with large shields joined into a defensive formation.

"Retreat!! Retreat!!!"

Since time was precious and he still needed to survive Cox gave the order to retreat again and again.

"Shit! How many of them are there?!!

One of the soldiers who had managed to survive until now was attacked by fifteen Haunting Wolves, but it was unknown how many were actually real.

"I've heard that Haunting Wolves can control two or three illusions at the same time. Perhaps they can make five or more though……"

Cox let out a curse as a nearby subordinate gave his thoughts on the matter.

Holding up shields while retreating, the few that managed to escape the death god's grasp were forming into large groups reminiscent of their actual military units. The joyful expressions they had while hunting for treasures were absent now.

As for the haunting wolves, they left the bodies around the carriage alone since they weren't showing any signs of life.

Before long, the site could no longer be recognized as a place where an ambush took place. Once they withdrew from the forest, the tension finally broke, causing the soldiers to collapse one after another.

Cox sighed as fatigue finally overtook him and the tension he had been feeling lessened. He turned to look at the remnants of his troops.

However, he could only curse and sigh again at the fact that the battle with the guards and the attack of the haunting wolves had cost him more than half of his men.

Chapter 10:「Reasoning the Unknown Away」

Under the dark and cloudy sky, the trees cast a gloomy shadow across the forest as I advanced in the direction of the screams I heard a while ago.

The smell of blood gradually began to mix with the wind, and the rumblings had quieted down. Only the sounds of my feet moving through the thicket could be heard now.

Before long, the path opened up to a road stretching in-between the forest and a ravine.

I now stood at the edge of the ravine that was about three meters deep.

A numerous amount of corpses were spread about the road and the stench of blood permeated the entire area.

In many places, chunks of earth had been blown away and a few smoldering fires were still burning here and there. An intense battle seemed to have taken place recently.

There were five large wolves feasting on the corpses strewn around this battlefield. They gnawed away at the bodies, and the unpleasant sound of bones shattering echoed throughout the area.

The five wolves had to be the surviving Haunting Wolves that we defeated some time ago, since some of them bore the injuries Ariane had inflicted upon them.

The Haunting Wolves were apparently scavengers. Once they noticed me appearing from the thicket, they raised their heads and bared their fangs at me while gradually retreating.

The unwelcoming hostility of the wolves continued for quite a while.

“Mawa!!!”

When I raised my hands in the sky and charged at full speed while shouting, my cloak fluttering in the wind, the Haunting Wolves turned tail and ran.

My loud shout was unexpectedly effective; even Ponta was surprised by it as she coiled herself around my neck, giving me a wool scarf before I even realized it.

Apologizing under Ponta’s cries of protest, I once again took in my surroundings while stroking her puffed up fur.

At the center of the bodies was a large black carriage, and the surrounding heap of bodies were knights in fine armor. They apparently tried to protect it.

The whole scene gave off the impression of a noble and their guards.

The four horses tied to the front of the carriage seemed to be dead, but there were two frightened unharnessed ones neighing and scratching at the ground with their hooves close by.

In addition, a considerable number of dead people who appeared to be bandits were scattered throughout the area, and I have yet to see anyone still breathing.

When I saw the Haunting Wolves from awhile ago, I believed that what happened here was due to Ariane's and my own involvement, but that doesn't seem to be the case.

I lightly jumped off the edge into the three-meter deep ravine, being sure not to step on anyone as I got a closer look.

The bodies wearing the matching armor of the guards mainly had sword and arrow wounds. Almost none of them had bite marks from the Haunting Wolves.

There were a couple bodies that had been charred black, probably as a result of magic attacks, but for the most part they were killed by human weapons.

While I was thinking such things, I turned towards the bandits that had been attacked by the Haunting Wolves. The guards had most likely been dead by the time the bandits had been attacked.

The bandit bodies next to the guards died by the sword, but most of them had bites from the Haunting Wolves. One person's arm was torn from the shoulder while another one laid on the ground with his stomach ripped out.

There were bodies that were dressed like Shinto priests whose heads were missing, leaving behind nothing but a gruesome corpse.

While mulling over the cruelty of the world and the gods, I made my way to the carriage, avoiding the heaps of corpses as best I could.

The door of the carriage was thrown open, and a woman dressed in maid clothing had fallen out of it. The carriage was covered in blood, and a dead noble girl in a luxurious dress was laying on the floor.

The blood was soaked into her long blonde hair and trailing down her lips while her chest had a wound that was clearly caused by a sharp weapon.

Based on the position of the guards and her location in the carriage, this girl seemed to have been rather important.

Her blood was still warm and there was still color in her skin, so she couldn't have been dead for long.

I could even see the traces of tears in the corner of her eyes, yet her half closed eyes were vacant, leaving the girl with a sleeping expression.

"Kyua～……"

Ponta let out a sorrowful cry while still being wrapped around my neck.

Stroking Ponta's head, I wound up thinking about one of my magic skills.

I know that it would be pointless to use healing magic on a dead person. However, the pope and bishop classes included revival magic.

It was a basic spell in the game, so the question was if it would work in this world like it does in the game.

If' I'm not mistaken, the intermediate class bishop possessed the spell【Revival】that resurrected a person with 10% of their health. Even if one was brought back to life with 10% of their health after being fatally injured, if their wounds weren't healed immediately they'd wind up dying again.

The high level Pope class has the spell【Resurrection】that completely healed the target, but I wonder how the spell would work in reality.

An unpleasant feeling crept up on me at the thought of the young girl's untimely death, so I placed my hand over her body and prepared myself to cast the magic spell.

"【Resurrection】"

The magic activated without a problem, as her body began to emit a dazzling, golden light and the wound on her chest began to close itself. Once the golden light faded, no injuries could be seen anywhere on the girl's body.

The spell is supposed to revive the target with full health in the game, but it may not replace the lost blood in real life. The carriage was still covered in blood and her dress was still dyed crimson red

When I placed my hand against the girl's artery there was a definite pulse; however she was still rather pale and had yet to awaken.

She was breathing normally as I took her out of the carriage and placed her down in front the coachman's seat.

I picked up the body of the maid and place her next to the carriage before brushing some dirt off of her and casting【Resurrection】.

Once again, a golden light was emitted from her body and all of the wounds began to heal.

She was revived without a hitch, but like the girl before had yet to wake up.

Resurrection seemed possible with this magic, but it doesn't seem to provide an immediate awakening like it does in the game.

I can only pray that they don't become monsters that hungered for the flesh of the living after their revival, like in a certain Stephen King novel……

While it was good that I could revive them, leaving two girls alone in the forest would only result in getting them killed, and it would be senseless to send them back to the river Styx.

I walked up to some of the bodyguards of the person I revived and started to cast【Resurrection】on them while avoiding the bodies that were dressed like bandits.

However, I discovered that the revival magic couldn't resurrect everyone.

When I cast【Resurrection】on an extremely damaged corpse, the wound healed but the person itself didn't revive. If the body was completely burnt or the head was missing, the revival magic would misfire.

I could only offer my condolences to the men dressed as priests.

Even if they did revive, they'd probably die right after.

The general cause of death was blood loss due to massive hemorrhaging, but there were a few whose cause of death I couldn't determine.

A few of the soldiers had fatal arrow wound in their chests, and after they revived they would breathe for a while before dying in their sleep.

There may be multiple stipulations of revival magic, but at the moment, I was still unaware of them.

As I placed my hands on my hips and looked around, I felt that the revival of everyone took quite a bit of energy. A total of thirty more people had been revived, enough bodyguards left to safely traverse the forest.

It seems that I cast revival magic a little too much, as I felt a little languid after using such a large amount of magic.

The rapid sensation of spells wasn't enough to deplete my mana, but without the game

interface, I had to rely of my senses instead of a number gauge.

The lost mana probably won't be a problem thanks to the effect of『Overcoat of the Night Sky』which I was currently wearing.

The『Overcoat of the Night Sky』has the effect of restoring a set amount of mana over time, that amount increasing if you stand still.

The location around the carriage reeked of blood, yet as the sole standing knight, I remained unaffected by it.

I think it would be best to observe them after their revival, so I used【Dimensional Step】to move back to the top of the ravine and crouched down to hide in the thicket.

Thanks to my metal armor I stand out in a forest, so I had to break off tree branches to cover my helmet.

I was able to observe the carriage and its surrounding through a small gap without much of an issue.

I've ensured that they can now leave safely—.

* * *

Juliana's Group POV

A black abyss seemed to continue on endlessly, yet from its deeps, a consciousness was gradually surfacing. The faded sense of all her limbs began to return and the unpleasant smell and firm sensation cause her to open her eyes fully conscious.

She struggled to breathe in air as if her lungs had been filled with mud, she even broke into a brief coughing fit before finally taking a look around.

She laid her eyes upon the blood-stained carriage that she had been in a little while ago.

Princess Juliana felt lightheaded as she shook her head trying to clear away her confusion, then looked down at her own body.

Her luxurious dress was soiled with dyed blood and had a rather large hole in the chest area.

The scene of the sword piercing her chest flashed through her mind and caused her to grasp at her chest in a panic. However, even though there was a hole in the place she had been stabbed, the skin under her fingertips was the same as normal, with no wound to be found.

"……Feruna."

Juliana suddenly called out the name of her closest confidant and maid before frantically looking around.

Before long her mind became clear and she set her eyes on the carriage in front of her and crawled her way towards it.

She laid her eyes on the figure of the seemingly calm maid, Feruna. There was a hole in a similar area of her clothes as her own, and she fearfully glanced at her chest.

However the beautiful skin that peeped through the hole in her clothes wasn't enough to confirm whether or not there was a sword wound. Juliana moved in closer to Feruna and calmly looked down at her chest, then tears of joy ran down her face as she let out a sigh of relief.

What on earth had happened, what hadn't happened…… These questions that swirled in her heart were trivial compared to the knowledge that Feruna was safe.

Looking around she noticed that the ground was hollowed out and burnt. The surrounding area took on the aspects of hell, as the bodies of the Juliana's guards and knights were strewn about along with those of the enemies. There was even the occasional charred black corpse throw in.

She took in the miserable spectacle without being able to speak, and with another sigh, Juliana looked back down at Feruna as her eyelids began to slightly lift open.

"Feruna! You're alright…… you're safe now……"

She seemed to react to princess Juliana's sobs, as she fully opened her eyes and slowly turned her head until she locked onto Juliana's figure.

"Juliana-sama…… where am I……?"

Her mind finally began to clear as she slowly rose up and looked around.

Seeing the dreadful surroundings she unintentionally looked at Juliana as she remembered the details of the surprise attack that had occurred recently.

"Juliana-sama are you hurt? Have you been injured?!"

Since Feruna became a little distraught, Juliana had to hold her lips shut in order to question her.

"I'm alright. Are you uninjured?"

At the princess's words Feruna remembered what had happened to her and started to pat down her body before casting a questioning glance at princess Juliana.

"Juliana-sama, how was I saved?"

That was a question that Juliana could not answer.

If the memory burnt into her mind was accurate, then the two of them should have been

dead.

“I don’t understand it either, I just woke up a little while ago……”

Juliana’s well-groomed eyebrows lowered as she began to frown a little.

All of a sudden, the shout of a familiar male voice paused their conversation.

“Princess!! Feruna-dono! You two are safe!”

The owner of said voice was the acting commander of the princess’s guard unit on this journey to the Rinburuto Arch dukedom, Lord Lendl.

When Lendl saw princess Juliana near the carriage he ran up to her and started to bow so deeply that his head touched the ground.

“Princess, I’m so grateful that you’re safe! I am to blame for this latest blunder, truly—”

“Sir Lendl…… now is not the time for such things.”

When Juliana interrupted Lendl’s apology, she slowly started to stand and stared down at the kneeing Lendl as a strong wind blow through her long dark blonde hair.

The kneeling Lendl slightly raised his head at the princess’s words and waited for instructions.

“The scale and speed of the enemy’s reaction exceeded our expectations by far this time, there was nothing more that could have been done. By the graces of the gods, the three of us have managed to come out of this alive…… Rather than grieving over the things that happened, we should focus on what we can do now.”

“As you command!”

When princess Juliana resolutely looked ahead she wiped away the tears from the edges of her eyes and tried to speak to Lendl in a positive tone.

In view of the princess’s strong will, Lendl lowered his head again while receiving her orders.

“We are still halfway from Rinburto’s border. Since the remnants of the bandits may still be nearby, preparations will start immediately. As originally planned, we’ll bypass Hoban and head directly to Rinburuto. Feruna please offer your assistance.”

“Yes! Certainly!

“Of course, Juliana-sama.”

The three people’s determination was renewed when it was decided that they were to achieve their original purpose; however, a spectacle started to occur before them.

All around the battlefield, one after another, the fallen soldiers started to rise from the field of corpses.

Lendl quickly placed his hand on his sword and tried to hide princess Juliana and Feruna behind his back as he took a fighting stance.

It's common knowledge that undead would occasionally raise up and attack the living in places with high levels of miasma such as battlefields.

However, it was unheard of for undead to raise in less than a day, and this place was in the middle of a heavily traversed forest. Having never personally been to a miasma filled location, the scene before him confused Lendl.

"Please wait, Sir Lendl!"

His confusion was interrupted by princess Juliana's shout from behind him. Thanks to that Lendl was fully able to grasp the spectacle before him in its entirety.

He could hardly believe the sight before his eyes as the subordinates that should have perished in the battle, were getting up as if they had simply overslept.

Behind him, Juliana's and Feruna's eyes were glued to the scene before them in disbelief.

"Commander Lendl! You were safe!?"

The subordinates that saw Lendl ran up to him, even those that he was sure had died in the previous battle.

"Shouldn't I be the one asking about your well-being……?"

After looking his subordinates up and down, he found that they were the same people he had spoken with on multiple occasions, not undead. The man standing at the head of the group had an arm stained with blood, yet no injury could be seen on him. He only had a slightly pale complexion.

However, there were a few members that hadn't been saved.

Some of the people dejectedly looked at their burnt comrades, while others were trying to wake up their dead friends as if they were just sleeping.

"I was certain that I died…… What happened?"

The leading subordinate asked the question as he checked over his body

The man who had started to gather around began to laugh and shed tears once they confirmed each others' safety.

The scene could have been considered a miracle.

“Sir Lendl……”

Lendl vacantly stared at the scene in utter amazement, until Juliana called out to him and broke him from his stupor.

When he looked back at princess Juliana he understood the intent reflected in her eyes, so he called out to his still restless subordinates.

“Listen! Her highness Juliana is about to speak!”

He proceeded to move aside and dropped to one knee with his head lowered.

The revived soldiers knelt in a similar fashion to Lendl upon hearing his shout.

“Everyone, on this occasion we were unquestionably defeated by an enemy we couldn’t match. However, the gods had mercy on us, even though there are some that were called to the heavens and haven’t returned……”

There were approximately thirty men listening to her words, meaning that out of the fifty men she had been entrusted to, twenty had fallen.

Many soldiers became teary eyed as the princess spoke while others were trembling on the spot.

“However, we received a revelation from the gods that we should carry on! Now is not the time to remorse, it is time move forward! We have to repay the gods for the mercy we have been given. For the sake of those no longer among us, we must reach Rinburuto!”

“Ahhhhhhhhhh――――――!!!!”

The soldiers shouted a battle cry at the princess’s words.

Lendl stood up at once and began to hand out instructions to the knights and soldiers in rapid succession.

“Change out the carriage’s horses! Secure as many of the escaped horses as possible! In the worst case, only find enough to get the carriage going! Find any weapon you can use!”

Each of the soldiers began to carry out Lendl’s instructions without hesitation, having already reasoned away the unknown.

Chapter 11:「Strategic oblivion」

It was about thirty minutes before the supposed princess' group was able to get the carriage going in the eastern direction, and before long their figures had shrunken into the distance.

I cast aside the branches I had been using to conceal my head.

Based on the audible snoring, Ponta seemed to be taking a nap atop of my helmet.

Standing up slowly as not wake her, I let out a deep sigh in order to calm my heart.

Despite that, I could not shake my cold sweat and my gaze swims when I looked in the direction of the carriage.

What I thought was a simple noble girl was actually a member of some royal family. I revived them with magic and it was taken as a miracle of the gods.

When I became calm enough to think, I realized that resurrection was a highly sought after magic, hell even a pair of brothers searched after the philosopher's stone in order to obtain it.

A human would usually be brought back as an undead and given that there were no noticeable side effects, they weren't necessarily crazy in their beliefs.

But the opaque conditions means that I can't simply bring anyone back to life.

The strain I felt casting the magic also has to be considered.

Although revival and recovery magic were commonplace in games, if I overdid it here I'd probably be recognized as a saint or something. No, if handled incorrectly it could result in the formation of a new religion. Then there'd be the possibility of the new religion starting a holy war that engulfs the whole world.

It would be different if it was a village girl or a small noble's daughter that was resurrected after an accident, but the situation was a hundred time worse since it was a murdered princess that had been revived.

One thing is certain…… history has forever been altered.

——No, in an era like this, royalty will surely have a lot of princesses, so history shouldn't be affected too much, ……I think.

In addition, since there were no witnesses I should be safe— still it's probably for the best that I avoid using revival magic a much as I possibly can.

Inside of my brain, a national assembly was rallying for the dismissal of addressing this issue.

"Hmm. Nothing happened."

The motion won with an overwhelming majority and within a moment, the problem was tossed into oblivion.

While not jostling Ponta I turned around and headed back the way that had came.

A good amount of time has passed since left Ariane back in the forest. Following the markers I left behind, I used【Dimensional Step】to dash through the forest.

Before long, I came across three large white wolves that were tied up by their hind legs and hanging from a tree branch with their head pointed at the ground.

At the base of the tree from which the wolves hung, sat a dark elf woman that seemed to be sulking a little.

She sat with her knees up causing her twin peaks to be pushed out more than usual; I thought that she looked happy upon seeing me, but she returned to sulking a moment later.

“OI! Where have you been?”

“Uh, sorry. I got a little lost along the way.”

I pushed the undergrowth aside and apologize to her before making my way over to the tree with the wolves.

“The blood has finished draining from these…… Please take us to Raratoia.”

“Ah, that’s right! I was supposed to be looking for a suitable transfer location……”

I had forgotten that Ariane had asked for us to temporarily return to Raratoia and that that was the reason I had left in the first place.

At my statement, she began to cross-examine me with a stunned expression, as if she simply couldn’t believe such a thing.

Her criticism was understandable, I went out to find a proper location marker about an hour ago.

“Wait, I haven’t finished…… I forget my purpose because I was preoccupied with returning. This time, I’ll look for a proper location marker.”

While defending myself, I shifted my attention to the Annette mountain that peeked above the trees, to quickly inform her of my next aim.

Entrusting her with the still sleeping Ponta, I forcefully dashed through the forest with【Dimensional step】.

Hoping that her troubled heart would be healed by Ponta’s sleeping face, I started looking for a site that could be used for【Transfer Gate】.

Ten minutes later I found myself in a large field.

At the center of the field was a solitary large tree surrounded by bushes.

Despite being located in the middle of a forest, this was rather impressive scenery.

I glanced at the towering tree and noticed that I was the only person here to witness the flowers blooming.

It was similar to those found in Japan, and if this had been my former world then it would've been surrounded by a Shinto straw festoon, no doubt about that.

"Hmm, there doesn't seem to be a problem here."

While muttering to myself in the forest, I burnt this mysterious place into my memory. Fortunately, it was not that hard to do thanks to this scenery being so impressive and I quickly set off.

From the clouded sky above, the forest raindrops slowly began to fall.

After we transfer to Raratoia, our trek through the forest might be impeded by the weather.

I used【Dimensional Step】to return to the place where I left Ariane and Ponta and proceeded to walked out of the thicket.

Only to catch sight of Ariane burying her face in Ponta's belly fur.

“Ponta-chan, your stomach so soft～♪”

“Kyan☆ Kyan☆”

Ariane was speaking to the the surprisingly ticklish Ponta in a coaxing voice that was unusual for her, and both appeared to be having fun. I watched this scene play out in silence for a while before Ariane finally noticed my presence.

“A-Arc! Y-You’re back early! Did you find a location marker?!”

Even from this distance I could see that her lilac cheeks were dyed red and not only did she stutter, her voice even cracked towards the end.

However, despite seeing her usually awe-inspiring figure caught off guard, I strived to answer her as calmly as I could.

“Um, there’s a place just up ahead. After taking the Haunting Wolves back to Raratoia, our continued travel will depend on the weather.”

“T-That’s right. Thanks to your transfer magic we won’t have to traverse the forest during bad weather.”

Ariane cleared her throat in order to rearrange her emotions and gave me an affirmative nod.

Ariane used spirit magic to cover up the simple ditch that had been used to collect the Haunting Wolves’ blood.

The wolves were then cut down from the tree, and I help Ariane neatly arrange them.

Although they were slightly lighter thanks to the blood being drained, Ariane must possess considerable strength to be able to lift the corpses of the two meters long wolves.

Ponta sniffed at the Haunting Wolves before retreating behind my legs and peeking out at them.

“Well, let’s transfer to Raratoia. Ponta, I’ll rub your belly later.”

“Kyun!”

For some reason, Ariane gave me the cold shoulder when I said that.

She folded her arms and averted her gaze; even her cheeks puffed out.

There seems to have been a failure in communication. Wait, I was half successful judging by the Ponta’s joyful expression.

Ponta hopped to her usual location as I prepared to cast the magic.

“【Transfer Gate】!”

Since all of us, as well as the Haunting Wolves, would have to be transferred, I gave a little shout as I cast the spell.

Suddenly the usual pale three-meter wide magic formation expanded out to four meters as the spell activated.

The surroundings went black for an instant as the forest landscape changed to the one in front of the mansion that I stayed in a few days ago.

When I glanced down at my feet, I saw that the Haunting Wolves that had been laid on the ground had properly transferred.

Shouting when I cast【Transfer Gate】seemed to increase the size of the magic formation; something that'll be helpful whenever I have to transfer large loads.

However, I'll need to practice my power output in the future.

"It's already began to rain here."

Just as Ariane said, the rain that was on the verge of beginning in the forest was already pouring down quite hard over here.

Standing outside in this rain, I could hear the sound of a suikinkutsu ringing out.

"Since I have to go get some help for carrying and dismantling these things, you can wait in the house, Arc."

Without waiting to hear my reply, she ran off to a congregation of houses in the village.

I see her back as she left before staring down at the animals at my feet.

The tails that were normal looking in the forest were now shining the pale blue color that was the supposed characteristic of the Haunting Wolves.

Watching the tails under the dark and cloudy sky made them seem more mysterious.

The fabric made from them would certainly make for a good gift.

While I thought about such things, Ponta began to shake out her fur that had been soaking in water all this time.

"Oh, sorry. I should probably let you inside after all."

After knocking on the mansion's door, a response came from inside as Glenys curiously opened the door.

"Oh? You're back early."

"Well, Ariane-dono obtained an item for her older sister's wedding. So we came back to drop it off here."

While explaining the situation to Glenys, I looked back at the Haunting Wolves in the garden and her eyes followed along.

"Oh, the excellent Haunting Wolf. Furthermore, there are three of them."

Glenys admired the Haunting Wolves that were laid out in the garden while I looked up as the rain began heavier.

“Please come inside. Did Ariane go and ask the hunters for help?”

“It’s as you said.”

I entered the mansion I left the other day, and she guided me to the dining room on the second floor to serve tea.

I took off my helmet and began sipping tea. It was taken without any sugar, and its taste was similar to black tea.

In the next seat, Ponta was desperately trying to fix her wet fur.

I drunk my tea while watching her, and by the time I reached my third cup Ponta had begun to doze off.

“It’s rather late for this child. Since it’s raining outside, why don’t you stay here tonight.”

As she said, the rain has begun to fall in earnest as raindrops tapped against the dining room’s window, and despite it only being about eight o’clock it was already dark outside.

It might take some time before Ariane returned with the hunters to take care of the Haunting Wolves.

Since we came back to Ariane’s parent’s house, it’d be a good opportunity to accomplish one of my objectives.

With my determination alight, I call out to Glenys.

“Glenys-dono. This place has a bath in it right, so would it be alright if I used it? Of course, I’ll pay the price of boiling the water.”

“The bath? I don’t particularly mind. But there’s not really a price for it…… go ahead? Are you alright?”

She replied to my heartfelt plea for a bath with her head tilted to the side in confusion.

“Putting aside the fact that you are a skeleton and lack the need for warmth, how about bathing together with Ponta?”

“Hmm. I supposed it would be good to wash Ponta every once in awhile.”

I carry the sleeping Ponta as Glenys lead me to the bathroom on the first floor, that was invisible from the mansion’s front door.

Water was drawn from the river and stored in a container so that it could be heated by the bath furnace housed beneath the wooden tub. Apparently the furnace was a modern magic tool that used magic stones as fuel.

Only members of noble families seem to have access to the magic tool and water

containers.

I entered the familiar looking bath with Ponta, and we stayed in the bath till my bones were warmed to the core and Ariane had returned.

Wearing the traditional garbs of the elves with Ponta on my skull and a towel over my shoulder, I went back to meet the returning Ariane in style.

“You seemed rather relaxed…… did something good happen to your boney body?”

“Yes! Baths are the refreshments of life!”

My answer was full of smiles; unfortunately I lacked the facial muscles to express my joy, so she simply replied with a tired “That’s good”.

Chapter 12:「Hoban Visit」Part 1

The next day, I used【Transfer Gate】to transfer from Raratoia to the large tree save point that I had set yet yesterday.

After that, there weren't any problems and we managed to reach Hoban before noon.

In fact, there wasn't much distance from the attack site I had stumbled upon yesterday.

The city of Hoban was located within a large plain between the Annette mountain to the north and the Parnassus mountain to the south. At the base of the each mountain, a forest opened up in the east and west respectively.

Hoban was at the at the center of the plain and was surrounded by square-shaped outer walls.

Yesterday's rainfall had completely stopped and the afternoon sun was brilliantly shining down on the city, causing the stone wall give off a dazzling reflection.

Ponta sat on my head while the disguised Ariane and I walked the road between the rice fields towards Hoban. As the distance between us and the town gradually shorted, I started to notice a solemn atmosphere covered the area.

The city walls were around fifteen meters high and surrounded by a large moat. A gate tower was stationed on both sides of the moat and guards observed everyone that entered and left through the gate.

In front of the gate, a pair of guards were quickly inspecting people's luggage before anyone was allowed to cross over the moat's bridge. Thanks to the inspection, there was a large queue of people standing around with their luggage, waiting to enter the city.

The north gate wasn't that large, maybe two carriages could pass through it at a time. Since Hoban's main highway traveled east to west, perhaps those gates were larger than this one.

But the eastern and western gates must be crowded as well because the occasional cart would make their way over from one of those directions.

Just before we reached the gate, a guard jumped onto a cart and tore off a person's cloak to get a good look at their face. The situation was so dire that even adventures had to relent and be inspected one by one.

This inspection felt more like they were looking for someone rather than a simple baggage search.

In any case, it would be impossible for us to slip into the town under such a heavy inspection.

I looked back at Ariane and the gray cloak she was wearing to hide the fact that she was a

dark elf and her eyes.

While the treaty with the Rhoden Kingdom was supposed to prohibit the capture and selling of elves, it did not mean that it was properly enforced.

From what I've learned, dark elves would go for a higher price than regular elves, and there would certainly be potential buyers everywhere.

And if the sale contracts were to be believed, then it would certainly be the case in Ferris De Hoban's territory. The feudal lord called Hoban, who was ignoring national law, would obviously try to buy an elf that had been exposed in his city.

There's also the fact that I'm nothing but a skeleton under this armor. I also cannot relent and remove my helmet for the guard's inspection.

"Seems like it is impossible for us to enter the city through the gate."

"Yeah."

From the depths of her gray cloak, Ariane's golden eyes focused on the on the city as she nodded.

Still, we couldn't simply leave without getting information on the elves that had been sold here, so we had no choice but to walk around the city and find a place to sneak in.

The road along this side of the moat had comparatively greater pedestrian traffic, and it seemed unlikely that we could transfer to the top of the outer wall from here. We might have to wait till dusk and used the cover of darkness to get in without the public's attention.

Together with Ariane and Ponta, we walked along Hoban's eastern wall in search for a place with fewer guards.

I noted that the town was considerably large as we walk along the path.

Before long we came upon the eastern gate, which was more than twice the size of the northern gate.

Needless to say that the bridge in front of the gate was overflowing with wagons and people.

Probably due to the number of guards carrying out the inspections, there seemed to be fewer guards standing watch atop the wall.

It would be easy to transfer over the gate now and enter the city, but there were too many people waiting for inspection who would spot us.

Leaving with Ariane, we sneak around to the southern side of the city.

The south gate wasn't that large and it seemed that it was only used by farmers to come

and go to the nearby farmland.

The small amount of pedestrian traffic consisted only of exhausted, empty-eyed farmers.

As I walked along the path, all the haggard looking Hoban farmers that saw me looked upon me with fear or tried to avoid direct eye contact.

They showed no reaction when they saw Ariane, so maybe the helmet was the problem.

The luxurious armor was covered by my black cloak, but the helmet couldn't be completely concealed.

However, their avoidance of eye contact was rather convenient for our current situation.

"Ariane-dono, I can transfer inside from here. Grab on."

"Alright."

While confirming that there was no one watching, I knelt down and spoke with Ariane. She responded to me while placing her hand on my shoulder.

"【Dimensional Step】"

As the spell activated the scenery changed and now we stood on top of one of the city's wall, so I lowered my gaze to look around.

Since we can't stay on the wall forever I quickly looked for a suitable place inside Hoban to transfer to.

I found a location near some rundown houses around the south gate, no one too rich was probably living around there. Using【Dimensional Step】once more, I transferred us behind one of the houses.

"We finally managed to enter Hoban……"

I mutter so as I looked back at the city wall from behind the house.

"First, we must find the man named Ferris De Hoban and his buyers."

Dressed in her gray cloak, Ariane stated our objective while observing our surroundings.

"Since his name is Hoban, he may be a part of the feudal lord's family…… for now, let us look for the feudal lord's castle."

If we simply asked about the illegal capture of elves in this city, I doubt that we would find any useful clues.

It'd be faster to just check out the feudal lord and his retinue

Since we were trying to find the lord's castle we naturally decided to head for the center of Hoban.

With that in mind, we set out to leave this rundown district. The streets were lined with wooden buildings in similar states of disrepair and there were very few signs of life.

When the people in the area saw us, they would get a stiff expression before running off. There were so few people around it almost felt like a ghost town.

For some unknown reason, everyone reacts the same way whenever they notice my knight's helmet. Where the knights of Hoban a bunch of rowdy people?

I thought about such things while we walked and after a while, we came to a place that was more lively. Merchant stands lined the streets, with hawkers and vendors loudly engaging in business. There seems to be a vigor to the city as the coming and going of carts and people created a lot of noise.

However, peoples with dangerous eyes are occasionally seen and guards were stationed everywhere, creating a rather unfriendly atmosphere.

The inspections at the gates and the weird atmosphere made me think that something must be happening in this city.

"This is a rather solemn atmosphere……"

"A large number of guards downtown would make it difficult to move about."

Ariane keeps an eye on the crowd while we talked and walked through the streets. A few minutes later I was able to spot castle walls near the center of town.

That was probably the lord's castle. The walls were almost as tall as the city's and prevented us from seeing the castle itself. There was a moat dug in front of the walls, making it difficult to approach.

My gaze went to the bascule bridge and the excessive amount of guards that were intimidating the people in the area. There wasn't a single person on the bridge, and the guards gave the impression that anyone carelessly approaching it would get a sound thrashing.

Entering from the front would be impossible, so I began looking for an infiltration point along the wall as we walked around the perimeter.

However, guards were placed at regular intervals along the moat and even on top of the wall.

The street next to the moat also had a lot of pedestrian traffic, making transferring to a remote location difficult.

We could try to transfer at night under the cover of darkness, but there wouldn't be many transfer locations unless there was a lot of moonlight tonight.

On account of yesterday's rain, I could only pray for that—

So I looked up at the sky.

The sun was blocked by some clouds, but there was still enough light to reflect off the moat's water. Relieved that my fears were for naught, a sudden angry shout caught my attention.

Looking towards the direction of the shout, I saw a pair of guards hitting a small boy. There were many people watching, yet no one stepped up to put an end to the unpleasant sight.

"Watch where the hell you're walking! You piece of shit!!"

"Dirty kids like you shouldn't even be around here! You fucking eyesore!!"

The guards began to shout cruel insults while kicking the boy who cowered on the ground.

The boy had unkempt black hair and was wearing dirty rags. The kid was around 13 or 14 years old. Blood began to flow from the cuts caused by the kicks, yet the boy only glared back at the guards. His rebellious stare only seemed to anger the guards more.

"What's with that look! You're a rather impertinent brat despite being poor!"

I couldn't bear watching this uncomfortable scene anymore

When one of the guards was about to kick the boy again I spoke out.

"How about you stop this here and now? The kid has already had enough."

"Who the fuck said that?! Who dares to unnecessarily interfe—！？"

One of the guards turned towards the crowd to shout, but the last bit was cut off.

When the guards saw my black cloaked figure with bits of silver armor exposed as I partially unsheathed the holy thunder sword, they turned blue in the face.

Since I thought that she would detract from my dignified appearance, an unhappy Ponta had been left behind in Ariane's bosom

"……It's enough already, isn't it?"

After I faced the guards and asked them the same question in a lower tone, the guards stiffly stood at attention and offered a salute while their heads were lowered at a 90° angle.

"Yes! I'm sorry for causing you trouble! We shall take our leave!"

The guards raised their heads before they hurriedly left the place where the boy was.

The effect of the armor was greater than I thought it'd be. After all, there was no way a mere knight or adventurer would be clad in such luxurious armor. It probably gave the impression of a high-class knight.

The armor seemed to affect the surrounding people as well, because they quickly went about their business and soon the surroundings started to clear out.

"If you're hurt, I can heal you with my magic?"

The boy looked fearfully at my armor while I was asking this question, yet he somehow managed to get into a sitting position and glare at me as he answered.

"What do you want in return……"

Holding his stomach that the guards had repeatedly kicked, the boy tried to stand up but only managed to fall to his knees with a grimace.

"I am not the feudal lord's underling. Since I can use healing magic, wouldn't you like for your wounds to be gone in a blink of an eye?"

Covering my armor back up, I kneeled down and asked him again, which caused the boy's expression to change.

"Healing……magic…… If you use that…… could injuries as bad as this be healed?"

"Yes, they can be healed."

Even the dead could be revived when I use magic, so even the most severe injuries could be healed. Resurrecting too many people was taboo, but healing an injured child with my magic should be all right.

When I nodded at the boy's question, I saw a shimmer of hope enter his eyes.

Does that mean nobody else would've been willing to treat him?

"I'll sell you information…… for the healing magic. Will you cure my little sister too!?"

"Hmm, I wasn't expecting anything in return in the first place, is that really necessary?"

"I will pay any price…… I'm not asking for a handout."

Though he came off as a little stubborn, at his age it could be seen as pride.

To him, it was reasonable that he would offer something of equal value in order to fulfill his request.

"You said that you'll sell information…… What kind of information do you have to offer?"

"……Side streets, secret paths……"

The boy's lips unintentionally loosened as he started to list off what he could offer.

"Huh? …… You wouldn't happen to know a secret way into the feudal lord's castle, do you?"

When the boy heard the question, his eyes opened wide as he quickly glanced at the people left in the area. In a quiet voice, he then asked:

"……Why do you ask?"

The boy inquisitively stared at me for a moment.

After receiving such a treatment at the hands of the local lord's guards, there was no chance he would leak our conversation to them

"I'm looking for a little something in the castle……"

I let my words trail off at the end as I didn't want to clue the kid in on our true objective. Wrinkles form on the boy's forehead as he thought it over, but he lifted his head once he found his answer.

"Alright…… I'll tell you the secret path to the feudal lord's castle. However, you have to treat my sister first."

"I understand. I'll take that information as payment for healing your little sister with my magic."

As the pain finally began to lose its hold over the boy, he stood up with a grimacing face and started to walk down the streets with a slight limp in his step.

Chapter 13:「Hoban Visit」Part 2

Ariane and I are currently following the boy through back alleys

We seemed to be heading in the direction of the southern gate, close to where we had transferred into Hoban.

As we leave the immaculate downtown area that surrounded the feudal lord's castle, the number of beautiful houses and people gradually reduced, giving way to an area with a deserted atmosphere.

The boy stopped once we reached the slums that lined the southern wall of the city.

The peculiar smell of decay and animals covered the land, a rather unsanitary smell, and Ariane had to grimace even in the depths of her cloak.

"Here."

However, seemingly accustomed to the smell, the boy just walked down the complex network of narrow alleyways before he entered one of the shacks

The roof was rather low so I had to bend down while entering, and the drafty shack was rather crowded with four people inside.

There was a single girl sleeping under a blanket of old rags inside the shack, and the boy quietly approached the girl before gently shaking her awake.

"……Onii-chan?"

There didn't seem to be more than a year's difference between the boy and the girl that called out to him.

She had black hair like the boy, but hers was rather long and unkempt.

"How'd you get those injuries? Did the guards do this to you?"

When the girl was fully awake, she slowly sat up and looked worriedly at her brother while tears started to gather in her eyes.

"This much is nothing. I brought a person that can heal your legs with me."

The boy wiped some blood from the corner of his mouth as he answered before turning his eyes in my direction as if prompting an introduction.

The girl followed the boys line of sight and finally noticed our presence. When she saw me, she became scared and hid in the boy's shadow

"No need to fear, I'm not one of the feudal lord's soldiers or knights. I'm Arc, just a simple traveler. The person behind me is my companion. Forgive our intrusion."

The girl silently opened her mouth as the cloaked Ariane offered a small nod with her eyes still covered, and Ponta began to briskly wag her tail while she was still held close to Ariane's chest.

The girl's expression slightly relaxed when she looked at Ponta.

"Mister Arc, please heal the legs of my sister Shea. I beg you."

The boy had an earnest expression as he lowered his head to the floor.

While giving a generous nod, I pulled back the blanket of rags from the girl called Shea to look at her legs.

The girl's thin legs were both set by pieces of boards tied together with strings.

"I asked an old man in the neighborhood to examine her legs, but he said that they couldn't be healed……"

The boy explained the origin of the boards while looking at his sister's legs.

The boards were acting as supports for her legs since both them had badly fractured bones. I don't know if she would be paralyzed or not even if she did heal on her own. The intermediate level recovery magic of the bishop class would be required.

When I gently moved her legs, Shea got teary-eyed and grimaced in pain.

The bones don't seem to have set yet.

"It's been nearly a month, but they show no signs of healing……"

I looked at the boy to see that he was making fists and was on the verge of tears.

It necessary to have proper nourishment in order for bone fractures to heal, and considering the state of this place it's unlikely that she's been receiving proper meals.

"You can trust me.【Major Heal】."

I place my right hand over Shea's legs and cast the bishop class spell. The area overflows with an ambient light.

The brother merely watched the fantastic scenery in utter amazement

While Ariane only sighed and shrugged her shoulders as she watched from behind.

When I moved my hands, Shea looked down at her legs and touched them out of sheer amazement.

"Onii-chan, my legs don't hurt anymore……"

“Really!?”

While the boy let out a surprised cry, Shea joyfully removed the splints from her legs and trying to stand; however, she had no strength in her legs and immediately fall on her behind.

“The bones were just reconnected. Don’t overdo it.”

Since she hadn’t moved them for nearly a month, she has lost a considerable amount of leg strength.

She wasn’t getting enough nourishment either, her whole body was as thin as deadwood. In this situation, even if the fracture is healed, the bone could break again at any moment.

“Kid, take this and buy your sister something nutritious to eat.”

I said that as I pulled out five gold coins from the leather pouch tied around my waist and held them out to the boy.

Although the boy was surprised for a moment, he refocused his thoughts and quickly looked away from the coins.

“I am Sil, not a beggar! Didn’t I say before that I’m not looking for any handouts?!”

“No Sil, you’re not a beggar. I do not dislike that pride of yours. However, you need to think about what’s most important to you before you answer. Instead of seeing this as a handout, accept this now and return the favor with interest. This is for your younger sister.”

I used that glib to justify our meddling, and overall it sounded very persuasive to me.

Sil thought about it for a moment before he spoke out in embarrassment.

“……Alright. However, please make it copper coins instead of gold ones! Because of my looks, I can’t go shopping with gold coins.”

Sil was certainly making a reasonable argument.

A kid with gold coins would be an easy mark in the slums, and I suspect that the stores would overcharge him as well.

No, the aggressive guards are likely to take them too.

“Oh, that’s right. Sil, you are rather reliable……”

A little ashamed of my thoughtlessness, I offered Sil some praise.

“……Isn’t this mister just too careless?”

Ignoring Ariane’s stifled laughter behind me, I took a leather pouch out of my luggage bag and handed it to Sil.

During the free time I had when I stayed in an inn, I sorted the gold, silver, and copper coins into their own separate pouches.

The pouches were packed to the brim with coins, and a「Jingle Jingle」could be heard as the pouch falls into Sil's small hands. He was obviously shocked at the weight.

"How many coins…… are in this……"

"It should be about 300 coins. I can add some silver ones if you like?"

When I offered to give him more, Sil looked at the pouch in his hands before he shook his head like a broken toy.

"Th-This is more than enough! Please wait here for a little while."

Standing up as he said so, he lifted a floorboard in the corner and brushed away same dust, revealing a wooden box that had been buried in the ground.

Sil removed the cover to reveal ten copper coins, and he protectively placed the leather pouch inside the box before covering it back up.

Seems like he usually hides money and valuables in there.

When Sil was finished he bashfully lowered his eyes and smiled while giving me a small "Thank you, mister."

No matter what world you're in, seeing a child smile always left you with a good feeling.

"Shea, your brother is a good kid."

While I chuckled and patted her brother's head, Shea nodded with a full-faced grin as he was being praised.

Sil, the person in question. raised a protest as he tried to fix his disheveled hair.

“Arc you really are a kind person aren’t you……”

Looking back, I saw Ariane letting out a surprised statement as she tried not to laugh at the exchange that just took place.

“I suppose it’s time we received our promised reward.”

When I said so, I noticed that Sil’s face had become rather glum as he brooded over something.

I thought that the secret path that he spoke of was non-existent, but as I was about to suggest that, Sil stood up and went to the shack’s entrance.

"……I'll lead you to the secret entrance. Come on……"

By the time we left the shack the sun was beginning to set.

Under these circumstances, Sil lead us through the back alleys of the slums till we came upon a stone bridge that stood over a shallow creek.

The width of the bridge couldn't hold more than two carriages at a time and it would be rather difficult to cross since the moss covering it gave it an aged feeling.

"Here."

However, the place that Sil pointed to wasn't across the bridge, but one of the bridge's support pillars that were right beneath it.

Directly beneath the section of the bridge that connected to the road, the muddy water began to flow into a tunnel. There was an iron fence in front of the tunnel, almost as if it were a large sewer.

Sil skillfully slipped through the iron bars and somehow moved the fence aside so that a normal sized adult could enter the tunnel.

This fence had probably been placed there in order prevent anyone from coming and going as they pleased.

However, even though two normal people could pass through the gate, the passage was too narrow for me and my armor because I got stuck and could not advance after the first step.

"Mister Arc, what are you going to do about that bulky armor?"

Sil twisted his head while asking his question in a surprised tone

Trying to accomplish something without transfer magic, I grabbed one of the bars and gave it a strong pull.

"Fuwn!"

I felt no resistance in particular as I put some power into my arms and ripped away a section of three bars.

Sil stood there, unable to believe what was happening right in front of him.

The two of us focused on Ariane as she moved inside the tunnel and proceeded to pick up a lamp that was placed along the wall.

Sil held it up carefully as if it would serve some type of purpose.

"Wait a second while I light it."

When Sil took out a flint to light the lamp, Ariane held out her finger above the lamp and chanted a brief spell.

『ーFireー』

A small flame started to raise from her finger like a lighter, and she used it to light the oil in the lamp dish.

“Wow, so Onee-san is a magician too.”

Sil spoke in a slightly awed voice, as if he seemed amazed at the prospect.

Ariane waved it away as if it wasn’t anything special before asking Sil about the sewer while she looked around.

“How far away is the feudal lord’s castle from here?”

“Umm〜, we’ll have to walk for a bit. The smell in the depths is rather bad so you should prepare yourselves for it.”

Sil offered a warning as he took the lamp and ventured deeper into the tunnel. Honestly, I had the feeling that we exploring an underground labyrinth.

So that you didn’t have to walk through the raw sewage, a walkway had been created on both sides of the sewer which was large enough for one person to walk on at a time.

The walls of the sewer were lined with brick grooves and support beams that were installed at regular intervals; resulting in the tunnel having an atmosphere reminiscent of a coalmine.

As Sil guided us through the many twist and turns of the tunnel, the terrible smell kept assaulting my nose, even when Sil finally stopped.

There was not much difference between this place and the drainage ditch we walked through a while ago, except for a lack of roads. Sil slowly knocked on the brick wall until he heard something out of place and then proceeded to push that brick into the wall.

All of a sudden, a weird sound was heard and a section of the wall slide to the side, revealing another dark room.

Thanks to Sil’s lamp, I could see a long descending stairway that led into a damp passageway.

The passage the stairway led to was only wide enough for one person to pass at a time and the other end was connected to yet another stairway.

No one said a word while we descended the stairs of the hidden passage. The only sound in this wet passage was that of our constant footsteps; making the atmosphere all the more glum.

Before long, we reached the opposite stairs that led into a small room that had a few chairs and a table inside it.

Under the lamp's light, I could tell that this was some kind of secret bunker.

"The stairs in the back are connected to the feudal lord's castle……"

Sil awkwardly explained the stairs in the back before looking down.

Feeling a little doubt in Sil I climbed the back stairs to take a look at the panel.

There was a closed rectangular panel at the top of the stairs that probably acted as the entrance to the castle.

This was probably the hidden getaway passage for the lord to use in case of emergency.

As I inspected the panel, Sil came up to me and offered a deep bow.

"I'm sorry mister Arc! I didn't mean to deceive you, I was desperate to heal Shea's injuries! I did lead you to the lord's castle! In fact, I have an idea for how you can—"

"Oh! Apparently there's a storeroom on the other side of the panel."

While Sil kept talking about something or other, I lifted the ceiling panel and unintentionally shouted when I surveyed the surroundings.

The room I was peeking into seemed to be inside the castle walls. I could see the crimson glow of the setting sun leaking inside the room and there was a layer of dust covering everything.

"We should be able to enter the castle from here."

Looking back as I said that, I saw that Sil was opening his mouth like a goldfish and staring at me as if he couldn't believe something.

"Something wrong Sil?"

"Huh? Mister Arc!? That panel couldn't even be lifted by two brawny men! How?

Sil looked like a pigeon in front of a bird feeder, as his head looked from the panel to me and back.

"This much really isn't a problem for me."

"Wai-Wait a minute! Are you planning to enter the castle right now?"

Seems Sil finally managed to reboot his brain as he tried to confirm our actions.

When I heard his question I turned around and saw Ariane sitting in one of the small chairs

inside the room. With a small nod, she stood up and signaled her consent.

“In order to find what we’re looking for, it’s necessary that we infiltrate the castle immediately.”

While holding Ponta to her chest in a resolute manner she stepped in front of the stairs leading to the storeroom.

“Wait wait! If you and mister Arc enter the castle now, it’ll cause an uproar!”

Sil throws his small body in front of Ariane to prevent her from invading the castle.

Chapter 14:「Rebellion in Hoban」Part 1

"Even if you say it will cause a problem, we can't fulfill our objective if we don't enter the castle."

Ariane spoke in a sullen tone to the small boy who was holding out his arms in front of her.

This boy had revealed the location of the secret passage into the castle to us, yet he was telling us not to use it.

Ariane was an elven warrior who had a mission to fulfill, yet she still seemed slightly irritated lately.

"Sil, if you have a reason we should not proceed then speak up."

I closed the panel and sit on the stairs so we could listen to what he had to say.

Sil's eyes restlessly dotted back and forth while he was lost in thought before he started talking again.

"Hoban is already suffering due to the heavy taxation…… The unreasonable tax even caused my mother and father to die of illness…… The citizens were planning to start a revolt…… however, right before the plan could be carried out, another feudal was assassinated. As a result, the guards in the town and castle have been heavily reinforced……"

When Ariane heard Sil's words her eyes started to swim while I awkwardly looked down.

The increased number of guards and the strange inspections were all because of that Lord's death due to Ariane's actions. Hoban's lord was probably scared of an elven surprise attack.

A feudal lord selling elven slaves had been killed, so those who bought said slaves would naturally act more cautiously.

"It took a large amount of money to reinforce the guards, which caused the taxes to be raised even higher…… The person who told me about this secret passage is part of the rebellion, but due to the increased amount of guards they had to change their plans for safety's sake. The panel was something they believed to be impossible to lift with human strength……"

He kept looking at me as he talked as if he had something difficult to say.

Certainly, if the guards had been strengthened then our secret entrance could be blocked, but a rebellion might solve that problem.

Sil had said that the entrance shown to us as a reward was believed to be unusable and that he thought I'd be upset that it wouldn't open. He even prepared to offer me a different reward instead.

In any case, had Diento's lord not been assassinated, then the rebellion would have gone on

as planned, and there'd have been a chance that the elves would have been freed……

When I turned to Ariane, I saw that she was crouched down on the floor while still holding Ponta.

Since we were somewhat responsible for this, we couldn't say no to a way to fix both problems…… I think.

"Hmm, how about we sneak into the castle using the rebellion as a cover?"

While the rebels try to overthrow the feudal lord, we'll use this entrance to get inside the castle. With the rebellion underway, we could search for the elven slaves without much issue.

If we carry out our operation in the midst of the confusion there would be no need to fear pursuit either.

"I don't particularly mind…… when will the revolt start?"

Ariane's mood seemed to improve as she crossed her arms in tentative approval and asked for the date of the revolt.

It surely would be awkward if the new date of the revolt was set in January or the like.

"I can't tell you without speaking to Labatt first……"

Sil looked down with a sorrowful expression as he spoke.

It's something that couldn't be helped, I doubted that a kid like Sil could lay the groundwork for a rebellion of this scale.

Without the agreement of the person behind the rebellion, it would be impossible to coordinate the operation. The question is if that person would be willing to accept the proposal of two unknown people……

It's a pretty thin hope——

In my heart, I let out a sigh.

Following Sil's suggestion, we quietly let him lead us to the base of the person called Labatt.

We returned to the wall that connected the passage to the sewer and by the time we got back to the bridge the sun was almost completely gone

Sil guided us through the dark slums that only had a few lamps to act as small light sources.

Before long, we reached a building that was slightly less disheveled than the ones surrounding it.

Unlike the neighboring buildings, there was a stone wall surrounding the base. Sil walked up to the door and knocked on it in a coded rhythm before someone opened the door and spoke to him in a low tone.

The person that opened the door looked at us with suspicion, yet he prompted us to enter with a jerk of his chin.

Ariane and I entered the building obediently.

Inside we were met with the glares of several solemn-faced men. In the back of the dimly lit room, there was a large dining room table, and a single man set there watching us.

The man was in his mid-thirties and had brown hair and a mustache. The wounds on his toned arms didn't give the impression that this man was a farmer.

There was also a porridge-like meal in front of the man.

"Sil, I've told you before that you have to send word ahead before you bring guests here……"

After the man glanced at me, he ate a spoonful of the porridge and looked back at Sil.

"Sorry, Mr. Labatt. I was in a hurry……In fact—"

Sil summed up everything while Labatt listened to to the whole story with his arms crossed.

"Oh, Arc was it? You must have extraordinary strength to be able to lift that heavy panel, and you used healing magic to fix bone fractures…… You plan to use the secret entrance while our plan is underway? However, how can I trust someone who doesn't even reveal his face?"

Labatt was evidently amused, because he smiled while asking the question.

I'm covered in full body armor and haven't even taken off my helmet, while Ariane was covered head to toe by her cloak that concealed her face. We were completely suspicious.

So it was no wonder that they would doubt us no matter what we said,

"We're not particularly looking for your trust. We don't mind if this talk is called off right now. We will simply use the passage to enter the castle on our own……"

"What was that!?"

At our one-sided declaration, one of the stern men became so angry that Labatt had to hold out his hand to stop him.

"You have business in the castle? Perhaps you are elves……?"

Behind me, Ariane reacted slightly after hearing his words..

The surrounding men did not know what was happening so they looked around at each other.

“What makes you think that?”

“A few days ago, the feudal lord of Diento was assassinated and rumor has it that elves were the culprits…… since then, the feudal lord here employed those idiotic guards and gave them a single order: ‘Don’t allow a single elf into the city’ or something like that.”

Seems that a few of the feudal lords had in fact become rather cautious.

Labatt gave his guess before he let out a slow breath.

“No, it would matter if I investigate your proposal and identity now…… There’s not much time left either…… we have no other choice.”

“Ho, there’s not enough time is there?”

Hearing my question, Labatt crossed his arms and wrinkled his brows before he closed it and continued speaking while pinching the bridge of his nose.

“The first and second princes will be visiting soon. If the king’s forces arrive while we’re in the middle of a revolt, we’ll immediately be sent to the guillotine. We have to act before the princes arrive……”

“Will the date of the visit not change even if you cause a revolt?”

“……No, We’ll deal with that matter somehow once the feudal lord has been dealt with. There are various circumstances surrounding the capital’s nobles……”

Labatt lips twisted into a sneer as he spoke, and he tries to smooth down his mustache.

I see, there was another person pulling the strings behind this revolt. We were caught in the middle of the power struggle between nobles. Although I don’t know their intentions, it is probably just one noble trying to absorb another’s land into their own territory, meaning that this person was probably employed to eliminate the obstructing noble.

When the current lord was killed, I could only hope that a slightly better one is installed, for Shea’s and Sil’s sake.

“Actually, I was supposed to be receiving a good amount of fighting strength from the capital…… but just the other day, they were hit pretty bad by a group of monsters. So I was in a tight spot when we realized that the secret entrance couldn’t be used……”

“That’s unfortunate. So when will you carry out your operation?”

“Tomorrow morning.”

“That’s sudden, but convenient for us.”

“The preparations are already done, all that’s left to do is to give the order. If I send the message to our friends now, the collaborators inside the castle will move as well. Sil, could you guide Arc to the secret entrance by the time operation starts?”

“Yes!”

When Labatt addressed him, Sil replied straight away.

Ariane, Ponta and I will just have to kill time for now.

When we returned downtown, the lights in the stores were still on. People were eating and drinking liquor and a few women outside the brothels propositioned me along the way

Hoban was brighter and more bustling than other cities I’ve been. It took advantage of it’s position as a stopover point for the trading route between the Rinburuto Archdukedom and Rhoden’s royal capital, and because of that the elf-made, magical crystal lamps were everywhere

There were lively shops everywhere and a few stalls had kebab-like meals set out on large leaves for sale. Before we headed back to the shack, we bought a few of them for Shea and Sil, together with a dish called chana which looked like salted and boiled chick peas that were tightly packed within some wrapping

“Hmm, which way to Sil’s home……”

On the way back from buying dinner, we lost our way looking around the labyrinthine slum.

“This way, Arc”

Ariane started to walk ahead of me with Ponta in her arms.

Elves have the ability to navigate the forest without getting lost, and apparently they could even find their way through a city.

I, who always got lost in Japan’s Umeda Dungeon[1], couldn’t help but be a little envious.

“This has gotten rather complicated…… is there a way for us to get into the castle without using the secret passage?”

While Ariane led the way, she asked that question.

“Ariane-dono, I think that you are partially responsible for their current situation.”

“Th-That’s! ……I’m already aware of that……”

She responded to my little tease a little frazzled.

“This time, the feudal lord will be dealt with by the rebellion, so our objective hasn’t changed.”

“Well……, as long as we can help my brethren imprisoned in the castle. This is a one-time thing.

I heard her determined words as we finally reached Sil’s shack.

When we entered, Sil and Shea were eating what appeared to be small dried beans.

Ariane encouraged the two to eat the meal we had bought for them a while ago.

Sil was reluctant at first, but when we said that it was necessary that his sister eat properly for her recovery, the two began to stuff their faces with great relish.

Meat and beans might not be the most nutritious meal, but it was be better than just the water and dry beans they had before.

“Why aren’t you eating Mr.Knight?”

Shea looked puzzled while she stuffed her mouth with food, her cute gesture was like that of a hamster.

“I had a treat at the shop some time ago. So you should eat without reserve.”

“Yes!”

I stroked Shea’s head as I told her that lie.

I had to avoid removing my helmet in public as much as possible, and while I was trusting these kids, I couldn’t recklessly frighten them.

While Ariane bought a bit of the chana to her mouth, our eyes met for a brief moment but she said nothing.

Somehow she understood what I was doing.

However, without bothering to say anything, Ariane took a look around the neighborhood before using her earth and fire spirit magic to create a wall around the shack to keep the draft out from where the kids slept.

* * *

[1] It’s a large underground mall in Japan.

Chapter 15:「Rebellion in Hoban」Part 2

At dawn, I glanced at the sky that had yet to give way to daylight.

Hoban was silent while the tension in the air continued to rise and spread throughout the entire town.

The only sounds that could be heard were Ariane's, Sil's and my footsteps as we made our way to the stone bridge from yesterday.

When we arrived at the sewer entrance, there were two men standing around keeping watch.

Sil nodded at the two while he slipped between the bars and entered the sewers.

Ariane went in next, holding Ponta, and I followed behind her as she ran after Sil.

Ariane moved through the sewers without hesitation, whereas my directionally challenged self would wander around like a lost child in this underground labyrinth without a guide.

It wasn't a really serious problem thanks to【Transfer Gate】though.

Before long, we came upon the already opened wall entrance of the secret passage. A group of stern-looking men dressed like soldiers were hanging around it.

Since the passage was only as broad as a single person, they were probably on stand by until they could storm the castle.

We passed through the dank and dark passage and climbed up the stairs to the dimly lit small room. Beneath the lamp's light, a squad of men stood in the squalor.

Every one of them was wearing lightweight leather armor and they all had a tense expression while grasping their weapons tightly.

Labatt was sitting on the top of the stairs that lead to the castle, dressed in his personal set of body armor.

"Yo, you came. Quite a few of my former subordinates are also participating in the revolt. If you see a white cloth wrapped around a guard's right arm then they are our allies."

"Hoo, so you were once a guard……"

"Surprised that a former guard commander is taking part in this? It is now my plight to rebel against the feudal lord."

Labatt laughed as he twisted his mustache.

"What are the arrangements once we enter the castle?"

From the depths of her gray cloak, Ariane's golden eye's peeked out as she asked her question.

"Once we break in we'll split into two groups. This passage is connected to a warehouse located between the inner court and the main castle gate. The first group will gain control of the bridge and bring in support of the outside, while the second group will attack the guards stationed here so that the outside group has nothing to fear. Afterwards, our top priority is to gather everyone at the castle gate so that it can be destroyed."

He said so as he took a sphere about the size of a fist from his breast pocket.

The black sphere seemed to be a combination of 2 half-spheres that were tied together with a string. It resembled a baking pan ball a little.

"An explosive magic crystal!"

Ariane opened her eyes in surprise when she saw the sphere.

"Onee-chan is a rather knowledgeable person. This fellow can easily blow the castle gate off of its hinges."

"I heard that explosive magic crystals used magic stones as a detonating agent and that they were rather expensive……?"

"It a souvenir from our collaborator in the capital. That fellow blew dozens of gold coins on this."

That explosive magic crystal seemed like a magic-powered hand grenade. The collaborator in the capital must be a high ranking noble with a lot of funds to send something like that over to these guys.

"I assume that we'll be starting soon……"

As Labatt's words trailed off, the tense men in the room naturally focused their attention on me.

Prompted by their stares, I climbed the stairs in the back of the room and placed my hand on the ceiling panel.

The tension in the room rose to a higher degree as people were swallowing their saliva and focusing their eyes on my hand.

When I pushed on the panel with a little strength, I heard the heavy rumble as it opened.

The tension that had filled the room till had now turned to shock as Labatt started to give his men instructions while laughing in utter amusement.

"Admirable, but we all have our own jobs to do. Two people lock the mechanism that the ceiling panel in place. Four people stand watch around this warehouse, Sil go down and call

those waiting below."

"Understood!"

Sil responded in high spirits before he ran out of the room to get the men waiting outside.

After listening to Labatt's orders, the men in the room begin to calmly travel up into the castle one after another.

The panel above the secret passage was attached to a pulley connected to the warehouse's ceiling with a chain. Two men yanked at the chain to raise the panel before they secured it with a rope.

Once I was sure the panel was fixed in place, I slowly removed my hand and allowed the men to pour out of the passage one after another.

We appeared to be in a secret room within a warehouse, because when the room's door was opened we saw supplies blocking the way.

Four men opened a gap in the stack of supplies so that someone could peek inside the main area, while the members of the attack squads were readying their equipment.

When one of the four men at the door gave a hand signal, Labatt calmly nodded before giving the attack squad a signal of his own.

The men then slipped past the door into the main area before splitting into two teams.

Once outside, the groups meant to secure the castle gate and bridge headed towards their respective destinations by half-crouching along the wall. Once the castle group arrived, someone with a bow shot an arrow at a guard stationed on the castle wall.

The arrow caught the guard in the throat and caused him to fall.

A second arrow was fired and managed to hit its target, but before the number of guards could be reduced any further, the body fell off the wall and and landed with an audible crash that echoed through the area.

Someone on the wall noticed the sound and set out a group of yawning guards to the location with the now missing people.

Pretty soon the high-pitched metallic sound of a ringing bell was heard throughout the whole castle.

Khan, Khan, Khan, Khan.

Suddenly alarms started to sound all over the castle.

Under the dim light of the early morning, the sound of intense sword strikes gradually increased.

Shouts echoed as the guards and the group sent to attack the castle clashed with one another.

Behind a guard that had been overwhelming one of the rebels, another guard came rushing in to join the fight. However, the guard had a white cloth tied to his right arm and wound up stabbing the first guard from behind.

Ariane and I were slowly walking around the chaos-filled inner court, looking for places where the captured elves might be held captive.

However, I wasn't exactly inconspicuous walking around in a black cloak, so every once in awhile a guard trying to raise morale would come charging at me. Each time, I would lightly knock them on their heads, causing their eye to go white as they collapsed.

『–Explode. Slay thine enemies–』

In front of the castle gate, a group of men were trying to defend it, as a chant was spoken and the black sphere was thrown towards the gate.

When the roaring explosion and burst of flames went off near the gate, the guards in the vicinity were blown away.

Once the smoke cleared the gate wobbled a little but remained standing. While the gate's lower hinges were destroyed, the top ones remained unharmed.

"Fuck! There was enough power, but the timing was off!"

Labatt curses as he bitterly looked up at the gate.

It would take something like hand grenades to target and destroy the top hinges.

"Push it!! The gate has been weakened! Push it!!"

When Labatt barked his order, his surrounding men finished up the remaining guards before gathering in an attempt to break the gate down.

"Defend the gate to the death!! The others will rain down arrows from atop the wall!!"

From the other side of the gate, someone who was probably a guard captain commanded his troops to fight against the rebels.

Furthermore, soldiers soon arrived on the rampart and started to fire arrows on the rebels below. However, for every rebel shoot down another stood ready to take their place.

This situation left both parties in a deadlock at the castle gate.

We couldn't afford to wait forever for this pushing match to come to a close.

"Gangwayyyyyyy!!!"

When I shouted while running into the center of the gate, the people quickly parted ways.

My shoulder turned a pale blue when I ran at full speed and activated the warrior skill【Shoulder Smash】. A large hole appeared in the gate and the guards that had been pushing against the other side of the gate were blown away like leaves in the autumn breeze.

For a moment the area went quiet and only the sound of the fight outside the castle gate could be heard.

“The gate is opened!! Charrrrgggge!!”

Once the moment of silence passed, Labatt gave a rallying cry at the top of his lungs before running at the remains of the gate.

People got their bearings as their morale was raised and they soon followed after Labatt and begin to stab at the guards that were left in a state of shock.

When the surroundings became a crucible of confusion, I heard a joyous cheer from behind.

The drawbridge at the front gate had probably been lowered.

Soon a rumble could be felt and a battle cry could be heard approaching, causing the morale of those who had already broke into the castle to raise even further.

The guards that initially tried to fight soon scattered.

It would’ve been nice if they had been more tenaciousness in this battle, like in an RPG where a hidden boss would be brought out, but that was unlikely.

Occasionally, a few magicians would try to cast spells in our direction, however, they were easily dealt with by a clothesline to the throat.

Now we just have to search the castle for our objective.

“Ariane-dono, we should begin our search of the castle.”

“Yes”

After speaking up, Ariane moved out from behind me and the two of us quickly headed towards the castle.

Both of the castle doors were already ripped from their hinges, and the looting had already begun.

“These people raised a revolt to put down a tyrant correct?”

Ariane raised an eyebrow as she looked at the current state of affairs.

It was a familiar scene within human history, not everyone that takes part in a revolt was

the noble sort.

I couldn't say anything against them because I did something similar in Diento not too long ago.

When I saw a man chasing after a female servant with a sword, I swept his legs out from under him as he passed by.

First of all, we should check the underground dungeon.

We immediately found the stairs to the dungeon and descended into the darkness.

The guards had already run away. The cells of the prison were lined up next to each other, and while we did see an old man and a bearded man of unknown ages, there were no signs of the all important elves.

As we continued to thoroughly search the castle, we finally found what we were searching for in a corner room on the third floor.

In the center of the stylish room was a roughly made cage that clashed with the interior and inside the cage, a sole female elf was calmly sitting in a chair.

She had the green-tinged blond hair and long ears of the elves and she wore a black collar around her neck, as well as a thin silk dress. While she was looking ahead, her green eyes weren't focused on us.

"Aniki, is that a real elf!? This is the first time I've seen one!"

"Hah hoh, quickly search for the key! Hurry before someone else takes her!!"

The two men that came here before us started to search the room for a key so that they could take the woman home as a war trophy.

"Unfortunately, she is one of the people we're looking for, so please leave."

I called out the duo from behind.

"Huh!? That's unfair, you're trying to swipe our trophy away from us!!"

The well-built man referred to as Aniki had an awkward expression as he shouted that the woman was their prize.

Based on the way he looked it was clear that he saw how I blew the gate away, and that he was terrified of me.

When I simply took a step forward, the man reflexively drew his sword and took a fighting stance.

He seemed to want a physical altercation, so I took another step forward and delivered a

backhand to the man's temple.

The man instantly lost consciousness and fell to the floor.

"Bastard! Aren't we allies! What'd you do that for!!"

Unlike the other one, this man wasn't afraid, and he attacked with open hostility. So, I punched him in the face hard enough to knock a few teeth out and throw him into the back wall.

"Even though we worked together, I don't remember becoming allies."

Since I held back he shouldn't die from that.

While I had been playing with the two, Ariane had pulled down her cloak's hood and approached the cage.

"We've come to rescue you."

The women rose from her chair in surprise when she shows Ariane was a dark elf.

"I never thought help would ever arrive…… I suppose you had something to do with the noise outside?"

"There was a revolt against the feudal lord. Now let's get you out of here before it's too late. Do you know where the key is?"

"The feudal lord that bought me always carried it."

The women answered Ariane's question in frustration.

"Ariane-dono"

It'd be a waste of time to search for a key in the middle of this revolt, and besides, the lord might not even have it anymore.

Probably realizing my intention, Ariane stepped away from the cage.

"I'll have you out in a little bit."

Saying only that, I grab onto the cages bars and started to pull at them.

I heard the sound of metal creaking as the iron bars gradually bent.

〈Funnu!〉

I only wanted to create a gap in the bars; however, with a loud snapping sound the bars broke off and I was left holding two broken bars in my hand.

The cage wasn't able to withstand being deformed. I don't know if it was cheaply made, or

if this world's iron manufacturing techniques were simply too low.

The woman in the cage stared at me in shock and said nothing while I destroyed two more bars.

When the cage was completely ruined the woman was able to leave it easily.

While I was removing the collar from her neck, a loud shout was heard from outside the room.

"I've killed Earl Ferris De Hoban!!!"

Things seem to be wrapping up somehow how or other.

Since we no longer had any reason to stay, Ariane and I nodded at each other before I activated【Transfer Gate】to transfer us to Raratoia, leaving Hoban behind.

Chapter 16:「The Capital City Olav」Part 1

The next day, Ariane and I transferred to a location overlooking Hoban's city gates with【Transfer Gate】. We didn't stay for long since I instantly started to use【Dimensional Step】repeatedly to travel in the direction of Rhoden's capital.

The elf we saved yesterday was staying at Dylan's home in Raratoia and was set to leave the village tomorrow morning.

Last night I thoroughly enjoyed the delicious meal and bath at Ariane's home. When I get a house, I'm going to make sure that I'll have a bath for my exclusive use.

The thousand gold coins in my luggage bag were also the reason my desire to get a home of my own was growing.

Ariane's mother Glenys said I could come and go as I pleased, but something was preventing me from accepting that invitation.

The reason for that was the condition attached to that offer, which was that Ponta had to accompany me.

I could only tip my hat to Ponta for her ability ensnare the hearts of women and children.

Ponta was at her usual spot atop my helmet, and she would occasionally yawn at as she gazed at the scenery in-between the transfers.

It would normally take two days of traveling via carriage to reach the capital from Hoban, but the three of us didn't even need half a day thanks to the use of【Dimensional Step】.

Besides, the only scenery around here was that of a calming plain and occasional villages and their fields. With【Dimensional Step】, any large distance can be easily traversed.

Since the highway leading into the capital had a lot of pedestrian traffic, I transferred a little bit off to the side of the road so that we weren't seen.

Along the way, we came across a great river flowing south from the north.

Approaching the boundary of the river, I could see that the gentle current allowed the sunlight to be reflected off the water.

Soon we came across a large bridge built across the river, and visible beyond it was a large sprawling city.

Though it was difficult to describe the scenery that spread out in front of my eyes, the capital, separated into four layers by the walls that were built inside it, seemed to be the epitome of the architecture prevalent in human territories.

"This is a masterpiece……"

When I had that slip of the tongue while glancing at the city, Ariane tilted her head in confusion.

“What was that?”

“Hmm, it’s nothing.”

I shook my head while answering Ariane’s question before I once again stared ahead.

We made our way onto the highway and blended into the crowd heading towards the city.

The main reason we were heading towards Olav was to gather information for future operations.

We still had a few names on the sale contracts that we needed to look into: Londes De Lanbaltic and Drusus De Barishimon.

Since Hoban will be rather chaotic after the rebellion, we decided to go to the capital in order to look for information about the remaining two names.

In the distance, I could see the outlines of multiple people and carriages crossing the large bridge built over the Rydell River in front of the capital.

On the other side of the bridge, the road leading into the city was similar to the one in Diento. However, unlike Diento, the city’s urban district stretched into the third and fourth sections.

After crossing the bridge straddling the Rydell River, the city walls of the royal capital became visible.

The walls were over 30 meters high and the lack of trees, like those that surrounded Raratoia, only made them appear even taller.

We were approaching the 10-meter tall eastern gate now and one could tell how prosperous city was by simply looking at the vast amount of carriages and people that passed through it.

Ariane and I join the line for pedestrians that was beside the one for carriages and waited while watching the waves of people who entered the gate.

It wasn’t long before we found ourselves in front of the guards.

The guard didn’t give me more than an empty, fleeting look before he started to automatically recite a phrase he must’ve said an uncountable number of times today.

“Identification or 1 sek entrance fee.”

The guard spoke in the business-like tone and silently gestured for us to pass through the gate after I handed him 2 silver coins before he moved on to the next person in line.

I looked up at the large opened gate as we entered the Rhoden Kingdom's capital for the first time.

The street beyond the gate was the same width as the gate and paved with stone. Shops lined both sides of the street and the large amount of people passing by gave the impression of being in a huge mall.

The people wore a variety of different clothes and all the hustle and bustle gave the capital a real sense of vigor.

Ponta's restless movements were transferred from the top of my head as she looked at the scenery.

However, the capital was starting to show signs of the problems with having such a high population density. As the saying goes, "Fires and fights bloom in Edo.", and that became all the more obvious as we approached the crowded marketplace.

We came upon a group of muscular men fighting against one person, and by all odds the single man should've been at the disadvantage.

Yet that wasn't the case as the outnumbered man was well over two meters tall, wearing a turban-like hat on his head and a piece of cloth over his mouth. His upper body was bare, except for a mantle, revealing muscle that seemed as strong as tempered steel.

Despite the large crowd, the man's presence could be felt all the way over here and for a moment I even thought I saw the Conqueror of Century's End[1].

"Y-You bastard! Don't think you can just waltz into our territory acting all cocky!!"

The hoodlums tried to put up their utmost bravado in front of the turban-wearing Conqueror of the Century's End, trying to take the tension head on, however, it only ended up making them seem all the more pathetic. In turf disputes such as this, there is a conception that being underestimated would result in defeat.

However, the conquer either didn't remember the agreement or didn't see the men as much of a threat, as he only glanced down at the men once before trying to move on.

"Bastard don't just ignore us!!"

Suddenly the situation reached a boiling point as the hoodlums surrounding the turban-wearing conquer drew their daggers.

The spectators seeing the bloodshed that was about to happen started to scream as they backed away.

However, what followed were the screams of the men that had been shouting at the conqueror. The man with the turban had managed to approach two of the hoodlums and lifted them with a vice-like grip by their heads.

“Gyaaaaaaaaa!! My head! My Heeead!!”

“Make it stop!! Make it stop!!!

The two men struggled to break free as they cried out in pain as the turban-wearing conqueror mercilessly tightened his hold on their skulls, till the point where sounds of something cracking could be heard.

This display of an overwhelming difference in strength caused the surrounding bystanders to go motionless as they wondered if the men’s skulls would be crushed.

“You crazy bastards!! What do you think you’re doing!!”

Hearing the all the commotion, guards started to approach the area while pushing their way through the crowd. Upon seeing the guards, the spectators began to scatter in every direction.

When I looked back I saw that the Conqueror of Century’s End had disappeared as well, leaving behind nothing but two unconscious men with stained crotches.

“Such a barbaric place……”

While frowning at the smell of the urine, Arian let out a sigh from beneath her cloak.

“It’s convenient for use that this place is slightly barbaric, full of so many people, and easy to get lost in.”

Ariane and I were having this exchange while we were walking away from the scene of the incident.

“First, let’s find an inn to stay in, then we’ll split up to search for some information……”

“Alright……”

I agreed with the seemingly tired Ariane as we made our way through the city while discussing our future plans.

After walking the streets for a while, I tapped one passerby on his arm and ask for directions.

“Excuses me, I’m looking for an inn. You wouldn’t happen to know anywhere good?”

“Huh? O-Oh…… well shouldn’t a knight such as yourself be able to stay in the second district?”

The young man’s eye bulged when a strange knight started speaking to him, but he managed to give me a proper response.

According to the youth, we were now in the fourth district and the higher status and the

more wealth you possessed allowed you to move closer to the center of the city.

Only nobles were allowed to stay in the first district and it was a rarity for a commoner to pass through those gates.

After thanking the youth with a silver coin, Ariane and I continued down the main street.

The main street stretched from the east gate all the way to the second gate, and soon we found our way to the third district's gate.

The gate was around twenty meters tall and even the walls to the left and right of it were rather nice. There was a variety of stalls along the wall in a similar fashion to shops set up under the underpass downtown.

The security on both sides of the gate wasn't all that impressive, only having a guard station on each side. When we crossed the gate, the miscellaneous sounds of people moving about calmed down, but the number people remained unchanged for the most part.

However, unlike the wooden buildings that filled the fourth district, the buildings in the third district were made of stone and in a arranged in a somewhat elegant manner.

Since we would be more noticeable in the more upscale districts, we decided to look for an inn here.

Turning off the main road and walking down the shop-lined streets, we eventually came upon a large flowing waterway. The gondolas that were carrying people and luggage back and forth along the waterway gave off the impression of being in Venice.

There was a stone bridge that the gondolas would sail under, and it lead to a residential area.

The street wasn't as crowded as the main street and along with the shops there were restaurants and inns lining the streets.

We entered one of the three-story inns and booked separate rooms for Ariane and myself.

Since tonight's lodgings had been taken care of, Ariane and I split up after leaving the inn and began to gather information in the city.

Because the city was larger than a normal town, I decided to walk the main street so that I wouldn't get lost.

Besides, I wasn't sure I could get much information in the back alleys—, I walk the streets with that excuse in mind.

I never thought that I would have so much of a problem with information collecting.

Since Ferris De Hoban a noble with a city named after his family, it was likely that the remaining two people were lords with their own cities named after them.

If that's the case, then I simply had to search for cities with the names of Barishimon and Lanbaltic.

The easiest way to find this information would be to speak some merchants, as it's a requirement of their trade to be knowledgeable on that sort of things.

With that in mind, I retrace the path leading to the inn since it was a good place to start

I turned the last corner and came upon the row of stalls that lined the third district wall.

A lot of the stalls had been offering a variety of different fruits and vegetables, causing Ponta to wag her tail rapidly on top of my head.

"Kyun!"

Ponta started to fidget even more when we walked by a certain stall.

An old man was selling some dried berries by weight at the stall. The bitter-sweet smell coming from the barrel full of berries seemed to have greatly stimulated Ponta's nose.

"Old man, two cups of berries, please. Put them in there……"

I reached inside by luggage bag and handed the old man a small leather pouch.

"Yes. Anytime, Knight-sama."

Although rather slowly, the old man scooped the dried berries into the pouch I handed him.

"Oh yeah, Old man. I have a question. Do you know where the Lanbaltic or Barishimon territories are in relation to this city."

When I asked the old man that question he tilted his head a little before nodding his head like he remembered something.

"Oh, I know where Lanbaltic is. You take the highway out of the west gate to reach the port city of Lanbaltic."

"Hoo? To the west. How far away is it?"

The old man folds his arms and furrowed his brow as he looked up at the sky.

"Hmm～ it'd be about six days by carriage……"

That's quite the distance if it takes six days by carriage……

"Have you heard anything about Barishimon?"

"Sorry, I haven't heard anything about that～"

The old man looked at the sky for a while before shaking his head no.

“That so. Don’t worry about it old timer. This is for your troubles.”

I gave the old man five silver coins for the bag of dried berries and information.

The old man’s eyes bulged when he saw the coins but he immediately gave me a toothy grin.

As I left the stall, I started to feed Ponta the dried berries. I went to the other stalls to try to collect some information on Barishimon, but no one seemed to have heard of the name.

I succeeded in finding out some more information about Lanbaltic, but I couldn’t find anything on Barishimon. When I was starting to think that we had the wrong name, someone called out to me from behind.

“It’s been awhile.”

When I looked back, I saw someone I had met somewhere before.

* * *

[1] This is a reference to Raoh the Conqueror from Fist of the North Star google it if you want.

Chapter 17:「The Capital City Olav」Part 2

There was a large hat on her head and her eyes were staring directly at me. She had short, raven black hair and was wearing black clothes that seemed easy to move in.

Although she was only around 150 cm tall, the gauntlets on her arms, her leg guards and the dagger at her waist didn't give the impression of a city girl.

The girl's eyes were drawn to Ponta for a moment before looking back at me.

I remember those emotionless blue eyes from somewhere.

"Hmm…… I know you from somewhere but……"

"……Things seemed to have gone well in Diento.

The girl maintained eye contact as she spoke in a monotonous voice. The figure of a cat-eared ninja in the kidnapper's base flashed in my mind.

"Oh, the ninja girl from the other day."

Her eyebrows twitched in response to my unintentional utterance.

"Ninja…… so I didn't mishear you last time."

She raised her neck up as far as she could to look up at me as she quietly muttered to herself.

"I'd like to talk to you…… do you mind sparing some time for me?

When I nodded at her question, she looked at me with a serious expression before silently urging me into a less crowded alley, leaving me to obediently follow her.

She observed the surroundings and began to speak after calming down a little.

"Forgive me for the late introduction. My name is Chiome. I am a member of the Blade Heart Clan, one of the six shinobi clans."

Though she gave a Japanese-style name—

"The Jin Shin clan?"

I unintentionally spoke the name I was unfamiliar with.

"'Jin' as in 'Blade' and 'Shin' stands for 'heart', and together they mean 'Those who endure'."[1]

I couldn't help but notice that the characters in the clan name formed the kanji for 'Shinobi'.[2]

While I was in the middle of that realization, Chiome's clear blue eyes stared back at me apparently prompting an introduction of my own.

In response to her prompting, I give her my name.

"I am the traveler Arc. For my own reasons I'm simply wandering around."

"Is that so…… Well then Arc-dono, why did you call me a ninja?

I stared back at Chiome with sweaty palms as I try to come up with a suitable answer to her question.

She seemed to know the about the existence of ninjas but the word seemed to carry a

different meaning for her.

“Hmm, in my home country we call those that dress like you were and conduct covert operations ‘Ninjas’.”

I watched her reaction to my answer.

Chiome closed her eyes and nodded in understanding at my answer.

“So that’s it…… The name “Ninja” has secretly been passed down through our clan for generations. For Arc-dono to know of it means that you must come from the same country as the first clan head.”

Apparently, only the Blade Heart Clan know of the word ‘Ninja’. Since the records were only kept by one clan, then there is no doubt that the man who taught it to them had come from the same world as I……

The clan head she spoke of either had to been Japanese like me, or someone from earth that knew about ninjas.

Though she had called him the first generation clan head—

“Could you perhaps…… tell me what the current generation is?”

“……Counting from the first generation the clan is now in the 22nd generation.

I hung my head at Chiome’s answer.

Though I was expecting some time to have passed, there is no way that the first clan head would be still alive after twenty-one generations.

Even with that in mind, I asked her anyway.

“I take it that the clan founder is no longer alive?”

“Correct. The first head appeared 600 years ago and led the persecuted cat people into forming a new clan. That clan would later become know as the Blade Heart Clan.”

“Hmm, so was it that you wanted to talk about?”

According to Dylan, the members of the beastman race were lopsidedly hunted to be turned into slaves.

It was risky for her to be talking in the middle of a human city, especially since she was talking about her clan’s history in the country’s capital.

“There is a job that will require Arc-dono’s assistance.”

While I was questioning her actions, Chiome gave a bold response to my question.

Thinking about her actions in Diento and the current situation, it was easy to see that the circumstances for her being in this city and that the job she mentioned would involve a risky infiltration.

“Chiome-dono, are you asking a human to help you with this ‘Job’?”

She simply offered me a silent nod and stared at me with her deep blue eyes.

She probably wants help to rescue her countryman— that is, freeing the enslaved People of the Plains and Mountains.

However, since humans were the ones enslaving them in the first place, I had to wonder why she would ask one for help.

She clearly had her own agenda, and since I was offering my support to Ariane and the elves I couldn’t answer carelessly.

“At the moment I’m cooperating with the elves. It would go against my convictions to work with others behind their backs.

She made a thoughtful gesture before she started to speak again.

“I would like to speak with the elves you a currently working with. Arc-dono, if you offer your support for this task I’ll offer you the information you seek as a reward.”

Although there were only a few intonations in her voice, her words carried a slight hint of challenge in them.

“I-Information……?”

“You’re looking for information on the names that were written on the sale contracts…… correct?”

We stared into each other’s eyes.

“How could you guess that…… you should know that two of the three people have already been found.”

“Is that so…… then the only one left should be Drusus De Barishimon.”

I could say nothing in response as the corners of her mouth raised ever so slightly.

More than simply knowing the contents of the contract, she even knows about the people mentioned and was able to deduce the one I couldn’t find anything on.

“……I’m to believe that you know the whereabouts and identity of that person—”

“Yes. I know of those things.”

As you'd expect from a ninja.

While we certainly needed that information, acquiring it would mean helping with the emancipation of the slaves.

I have no qualms cooperating with her, but there's the risk of me standing out too much during this operation.

If my actions up till now become public, I would become a wanted man and traveling would be difficult.

However, when I said that two people from the contracts had been found she brought up Barishimon without any hesitation.

She must have done so because she believes that he'd be the most difficult person to find.

Even if I was able to find information on Barishimon through my random search of the city, the news of my efforts could reach the person in question and drive him deeper into hiding.

Dylan said that this girl and her like were descendants of spies. This meant that their information were better than what was available to us.

For the time being, I should go back and discuss this with Ariane……

"I need to consult with my partner before I can give you an answer."

"Please allow me to accompany you then, Arc-dono. I'd like to speak with your cooperator directly."

I thought I saw a little childishness in her blue eyes as I thought it over.

There shouldn't be any problems with introducing this ninja to Ariane—— I hope.

Even though I still had my doubts, we should be able to deal with any problem that come up.

"I understand. Well then, follow me Chiome-domo."

Chiome and I returned to the main street and we moved away from the third gate's wall at a quick pace. Despite her small stature, she was able to keep up with me.

Ponta must have been tired after my talk with Chiome because she dozed off atop my head. On the way back to the inn, I occasionally had to keep her in place since she would start to slip off from time to time.

When we returned I invited Chiome to my room on the third floor.

She sat down in the only chair in the room, while I sat on the bed.

Ponta seemed fully awake now as she checked the softness on the bed with her front paws.

A strange silence soon blanketed the room.

The ninja Chiome was restlessly staring at Ponta for some reason.

“Chiome-dono, the toilet is on the first floor.”

“That’s not the problem!”

Though I only meant to break the ice, she became a little red when she voiced her denial.

Even if it was only for an instant, she looked like a young girl.

I took a small leather pouch from my bag and handed it to her.

Chiome might as well have a question mark above her head, given how easy it was to see her confusion. She didn’t know what to do until she opened the pouch and saw Ponta’s reaction.

When she resumed her restless gazing, I took the chance to give an introduction.

“Although it’s a little late, this little fluffy fox here is Ponta. Those berries you’re holding happen to be her favorites.”

When Chiome heard me say that, she intensely gazed at Ponta as she slowly began to inch a hand full of the dried berries towards Ponta with her mouth agape.

Ponta stood up when she saw the dried berries coming toward her.

Chiome didn’t seem familiar with sitting in a chair, but she eventually managed to lean forward a bit.

As Chiome’s timidly brought her hand of berries closer, Ponta started to wag her tail in excitement.

When Ponta started to nibble at the berries with great relish, Chiome narrowed her eyes and smiled faintly.

“I’m amazed that Arc-dono managed to tame a spirit beast……”

Chiome stroked Ponta’s fur while muttering that.

“This fellow acts like that with everyone……”

I tried to answer with a bitter laugh, but Chiome shook her head.

“No, spirit beasts can detect malice within people. The reason I can feel at ease being in the middle of a human city with you is because of the absolute trust this beast has in you Arc-dono.”

At her words, I looked back at Ponta—— only to find her begging for more berries.

If she was to be believed, then my trustworthiness was completely dependent on Ponta.

Deciding not to dwell on that for too long, I asked her another question I had.

“I take it that she’s the reason you helped me save the elves when we first met?”

When we first met, she had figured out that I wasn’t one of the kidnappers almost instantly.

It wouldn’t have been strange if she just assumed that I was a normal knight collaborating with the kidnappers.

Chiome looked me straight in the eyes when she hears my question.

“My people, the elves, and even the humans each have our own respective scents. I smelled a thin trace of the elves from you when we met. But—”

She hesitated for a second as she thought her choice of words over before speaking again.

“Arc-dono, there’s a unique scent coming from you. It’s a scent that I’ve never come across before.……”

Chiome’s eyes narrowed as she looked at me, as if she were trying to see beyond my helmet’s visor.

The fact that I’m nothing but a skeleton may be the source of my peculiar scent.

Something in her eyes seemed to suggest that she had obtained what she was after, but that just could have been my imagination——

After that, we sat in silence until we heard a knock on the door.

* * *

[1] You have to see the kana that make up the sentence so here「ジンは刃、シンは心を表す言葉で”耐え忍ぶ者”という意味です」.

[2] 忍 this is the kanji for Shinobi This are from the clan name 刃, 心.

Chapter 18:「Collaborative Scheming」Part 1

Few people would actually visit this room, so I opened the door and invited the person dressed in the familiar gray cloak in.

Even with the cloak, it was easy to identify the person in question thanks to her well endowed chest while she stared down at Chiome feeding Ponta the dried berries.

There was a brief moment of silence between the two before Ariane pulled down her hood and Chiome took off the hat she had been wearing.

Ariane had exposed her dark elven lilac skin and pointy ears, while Chiome had revealed the twitching black cat ears atop her head.

“Chiome-dono, allow me to introduce you to my elven partner Ariane-dono.”

Ariane offered a slight nod before narrowing her eyes and giving me a questioning gaze.

“Ariane-dono this is Chiome from the Blade Heart Clan and she is the informant from Diento that I mentioned before.

“A pleasure to meet you Ariane-dono. I am Chiome of the Blade Heart Clan.”

Chiome lowered Ponta to the floor before standing up and offering Ariane her right hand.

Meanwhile, her black cat ears continued to twitch.

Ariane took the extended hand and gave her own introduction.

“I’m Ariane Glenys Maple. Thank you for providing that information.”

“A warrior from Maple…… I hear that they are the elites of the Canada Forest.”

While shaking hands, Chiome’s blue eyes looked at Ariane in admiration.

The ninjas appear to have attained some information on the elves.

Ariane stared back at the petite ninja girl in surprise.

“Chiome-chan, why are you here? Is there something you’d like to discuss?”

As Ariane placed her hand on her hip, I couldn’t help but compare her well-endured figure to Chiome’s small stature.

Although Chiome looked rather young, her tone and behavior were that of an adult, yet she showed no signs of discomfort after being called “Chiome-chan”.

“Ariane-dono can we hear what you found out before explaining that?”

Although Ariane called for an explanation, the situation with Chiome may change depending on what Ariane found out.

Ariane seemed rather displeased as her brow started to furrow.

“It was no good…… Although I was wearing my cloak downtown, strange men incessantly approached me as I tried to gather information— I couldn’t find anything.”

She looked tired as she let out a loud sigh.

The shrug of her shoulders caused her large chest to instantly become more noticeable.

The conforming cloak over her chest probably attracted the attention of the men like moths to the flame.

When I walked together with Ariane my presence probably acted as an insect repellent since I can’t remember anything like that happenings before.

As I man I couldn’t understand her feelings, so I gave an ambiguous answer.

“I was able to find information on Lanbaltic. As for Barishimon……”

Chiome stepped in front of me and continued the explanation.

“I’ll take it from here……”

Chiome gave the indifferent-looking Ariane a brief summary of what we previously talked about.

Ariane simply closed her eyes and calmly listened.

“I don’t particularly mind.”

Once Chiome was finished, Ariane agreed to take part in the emancipation of the slaves, seemingly without giving it much thought.

Even Chioma was surprised by the quick agreement to the request.

Personally, I wouldn’t have been able to make such a decision without thinking it over a few times.

The People of the Mountains and Plains didn’t even have a treaty with the humans like the elves did, so it wasn’t illegal for human nations to use them as slaves.

Without human rights, they were treated as little more than animals. And it’s pretty much impossible for there to be animal protection laws in this world.

“This is no need to consider Arc separate in this matter. This is what I decided……”

While I had been lost in thought, Ariane spoke in that statement in a calm tone.

She brushed aside a lock of her silver hair and fluttered her long eyelashes as her golden eyes were fixated on me. Her expression was painfully sorrowful.

In response to that statement, Chiome's ears subtly twitched.

"You should know that I intend to hunt down all those who enslaved my brethren……"

Ariane's voice quietly resounded in the room, yet it was fraught with anger.

"We are not unwilling to help you. I ask that you just refrain from any overly conspicuous behavior."

She herself was probably the reason for that last bit, since things would become difficult for the elves if her involvement in this affair became publicly known.

In fact, the high security we faced in Hoban might be even tighter in other territories after what recently had occurred there.

Ariane raised her eyebrow a bit as she thought about something.

"By the way, what kind of operation will we be taking part in any way?"

Groaning now won't accomplish anything.

She agreed to work with Chiome and the Blade Heart Clan without considering the content of the mission.

Chiome and I looked back and forth between Ariane and each other before I let out a sigh.

"We plan to launch a raid against the largest slave dealer in the capital as a decoy, thus we need a group to act as the bait……"

The overall strategy was rather outstanding.

After all, the raid against the largest slave dealer was a decoy…… however I'm not ready to risk my life on this collaboration……

"Chiome-dono, why the decoy?"

I asked her for more details about the operation in a solemn tone.

Ariane must have been worried about it as well because she simply waited for a response.

"There is a reason for that. The Etsuato company is the largest slave dealership in the capital and has strong connections with the nobility. If the company is raided there's no doubt that the guards would immediately respond. Worst case scenario, the King's personal army may get involved."

“How did you plan to escape with your enslaved brethren under these conditions?”

I nodded along with Ariane’s question.

“It is true that it’ll be difficult. To escape from the Etsuato company with my brethren is no easy feat, but the plan is for my comrades to simultaneously attack four other locations. During the ensuing chaos, we will make our escape.”

“Wouldn’t that mean that some of your brethren would become part of the decoy?”

All of a sudden Ariane’s words carried a shape edge to them

“It’s impossible to save them all. If you told me that I had to sacrifice ten people to save a hundred I’d do just that.”

What I saw in the depths of her blue eyes caused me to tumble a bit.

Even if she was a ninja, she appeared to be a thirteen or fourteen-year-old girl. Yet she thought nothing of carrying out an operation at the expense of her own people.

Even when she faced such a desperate situation, she fought against her circumstances without grieving.

I unintentional placed my hand on her head and began to pat her with enough force to cause her small body to hunch over.

Ponta also rubbed the scruff of her neck against Chiome’s leg in an attempt to cheer her up.

A self-mocking smile slipped from Chiome.

You could say that I was stepping out of bounds— but seeing her smiling face was a sufficient enough reason to do it.

There was no way I could ridicule a group that took what little power they had and became criminals in every human country.

If things with the elves don’t go well, then staying with the People of the Mountains and Plains might not be so bad. Besides, staying with a race of animal-eared people would be Shangri-la for members of a certain subculture.

While I was in the middle of contemplation, Ariane looked at me with a wistful glance.

I somehow know the meaning of that look.

I gave a small nod as I tried to burn the impression of this inn room into my memory.

“【Transfer Gate】!”

The pale magic formation appeared at the feet of the everyone currently in the room.

Chiome was surprised at the suddenly appearing magic formation, but in the next moment, our surroundings changed to that of a forest.

We were in the open field that had the large tree in the center of it.

The only thing out of place in this forest was the bed and chair that came along with us.

【Transfer Gate】had brought along every piece of furniture that was within the formation.

Chiome restlessly looked around and her ear contently twitched about as if she trying to make sense of the situation.

Ariane probably didn't expect me to invoke the transfer so suddenly because she looked shocked for a moment before letting out a sigh.

Demonstrating【Transfer Gate】seemed to be the most effective way of getting her to incorporate it into the strategy.

"Chiome-domo, we're willing to use this power in the operation."

"Where…… Where in the world are we?"

Chiome's mouth was agape after she asked that question.

"We are currently at the base of the Annette mountain range."

I answered her question while looking around.

"The Annette Mountains…… I thought so. …… Arc-done is able to use spatial-temporal ninjutsu……"

She started to mutter to herself once I answered her.

"Spatial-temporal ninjutsu?"

"Yes, the first clan head was able to instantly cross long distances due to him mastering spatial-temporal ninjutsu. It appears that you too are capable of it Arc-dono."

What I use was simple transfer magic, not ninjutsu……

I don't think that the high-level ninja class had spatial-temporal ninjutsu, but I believe that people that came to this world like I did should have a similar transfer skill.

It's possible that the first head simply called the skill spatial-temporal ninjutsu.

Was that first head guy a ninja otaku?

"Is Chiome your real name?"

I asked Chiome about something that had been on my mind.

“No, the name is one of the six titles handed down throughout the generations to the most skilled members of the clan.”

Chiome proudly puffed out her chest as she answered.

I was right when I thought that her name sounded like the famous kunoichi Mochizuki Chiyome from my former world. It wouldn’t surprise me if references to Sarutobi Sasuke and Kirigakure Saizo were among those six titles.

As I thought about such things, Ariane spoke up.

“Perhaps we should continue this conversation back at the inn?”

I can’t forget that monsters prowled this forest.

While everyone here seemed capable of dealing with the monsters in the area, this wasn’t a place where battle strategies could be calmly thought out.

Bringing the image of the room to the front of my mind I once again invoked the spell.

The magic formation appeared and in an instant everyone and the furniture was returned to the room.

Ponta even knocked on the floor with her forepaw to verify that we had returned.

Chiome looked around the room before nodding in confirmation of the magic’s effect.

“If Arc agrees helping you this time around, you’ll have access to the transfer mag—”

When I cut her off, Ariane gave me a look that said: “What?”.

I simply nudged my head in Chiome’s direction as a response.

After all, she had yet to divulge the date and time for the raid.

“That was magic that Arc-dono used…… If that could be used—”

I was about to turn away from Chiome, who was already in the middle of quietly muttering ways she can incorporate the transfer magic into the raid, when she suddenly raised her head and asked me a question about the magic.

“Arc-dono, what is the limit of the transfer magic that you just used?”

“I can transfer just about anywhere as long as I have the location memorized.”

Thanks to【Transfer Gate】I could instantly travel anywhere without worrying about the distance, as long as I could visualize the location that is.

For example, if I found myself in a city under siege, I could easily escape to a far off location

using it.

Chiome began to ask questions about how many times the magic could be used and the maximum number of people that could be transferred at once. Since there was still things I didn't know, I could only answer with my best guess.

In the game, even if I used【Transfer Gate】a hundred times in a row it wouldn't cause any problems. And I wasn't all that worried since【Resurrection】had a higher mana consumption then【Transfer Gate】so it should be fine.

When Chiome heard the general characteristics of the transfer magic her expression brighten up a little.

The three of us then revised the raid on the slave dealership. It was mostly the same, the only difference being that the released slaves wouldn't be used as decoys.

"Arc-dono, I'll inform my colleagues of the modifications to tonight's operation. Please prepare for the raid until then."

After saying that, Chiome opened the window and climbed to the roof before she started to run along the rooftops.

While watching her form shrink in the distance, what she said repeated in my mind over and over again.

"Ariane-dono…… did I hear that the raid would be tonight……?"

"I heard that too."

Looking back out the window, I saw that Chiome had already disappeared.

Chapter 19:「Collaborative Scheming」Part 2

In Rhoden Kingdom's capital city Olav, inside the royal palace, a man with visible blue veins on his hands was throwing a silver cup on the floor of a private room that was illuminated by magic crystal lamps.

There was a dull metallic ping when the cup hit the floor before it slowly rolled into the corner. The mellow fragrance of the wine that had filled the cup spread throughout the room.

The eyes of two of the men in the room followed the cup as it rolled on the ground, before they glanced at each other and turned back to the man that throw it.

"Fuck! Why now! Why was Earl Hoban killed now of all times?!"

The man that had thrown the cup was sitting on a leather sofa and clenching his hands as hard as he could. His normally handsome features were twisted beyond belief and a cold anger filled his blue eyes. This person was none other than Douglass Shishle Carunon Rhoden Vetoran, the second prince of Rhoden.

"We're having difficulty contacting anyone in Hoban due to all the confusion the rebellion is causing."

One of the men looking at prince Douglass spoke to him in a serious tone.

The man's hair was a blend of gray and brown and he sported a respectable beard, but only a feeling of masculinity could be sensed from the man's muscular body

He was Marudoira De Olsterio, one of Rhoden's seven dukes and the Major General of the unified national army. He was the one that had read the report from his liaison in Hoban.

"If those Haunting Wolves hadn't appeared on the highway we could've stopped Sect's schemes!"

"Your highness, we could have prevented the rebellion had the monsters not forced us to delay our plans."

When Douglass began to berate the monsters, the man beside Marudoira stepped up to calm him down.

The man that spoke up wore a military uniform over his stout body, as he was Setorion De Olsterio, one of Rhoden's three generals.

Despite Setorion's efforts Prince Douglass continued his anger induced rant.

"That's too convenient! Now Sect will be able to take advantage of the situation and quell the rebellion."

The two generals blew out a sigh without looking at the enraged Prince Douglass.

Originally they were supposed to meet with Earl Hoban and conspire to assassinate Prince Sect. However, the highway that led to Hoban was threatened by monsters and Earl Hoban had been slain in the revolt.

"I can only say that all of this happened in an untimely matter. We need to focus on the next opportunity……"

Marudoira began speaking in a booming voice.

Members of the king's personal army have already been sent out to deal with the monsters along the highway.

It would be difficult to leave the capital until things calmed down, making all their plans to visit Hoban for naught, and visiting somewhere else is impossible without preparation.

"Juliana also seems to have slipped off to Rinburuto undetected!"

As Douglass muttered that curse, someone started to heavily pound on the room's door.

"Marudoira-sama! There is an urgent matter that requires your attention!"

General Setorion quickly responded by opening the door a little to receive the messenger's report.

The soldier saluted General Setorion before whispering the content of the message in his ear.

Setorion nodded at the message and dismissed the soldier before whispering what he had heard into his father's ear.

"What?"

Prince Douglass, who so far had been quiet throughout the exchange, asked Marudoira what was happening.

Marudoira reviewed what he had heard before he started speaking to Prince Douglass.

"Your highness, the main building of the Etsuato company is under attack. The assailants seem to be quite skilled and the company representative is requesting aid from the army…… How should we respond?"

Wrinkles formed on Prince Douglass's forehead as he listened to the report.

"Why are problems like this popping up one after another?!"

Not only was Etsuato a major trading company, they were the ones used to evaluate the price of the elven slaves, so he couldn't simply refuse their request for assistance.

As the room filled with prince Douglass's curses, Setorion sighed before turning to the grim-

faced Marudoira.

"Father and I shall deal with this. We'll take some of your personal soldiers to help stomp out the criminals. The other side will be ever so grateful of the Major General for directly helping in this situation."

"As you will."

Seeing Douglass's twisted grin at the proposal, Setorion give a subtle smile of his own.

After Major General Marudoira received prince Douglass's command he quietly left the room.

When Setorion was about to leave he suddenly turned back to prince Douglass and started speaking.

"Your Highness. Concerning what happened in Hoban there was an unconfirmed report that elves were involved."

"What!?"

With that single sentence, Prince Douglass returned from thinking about his future plans to the present.

"The attack on the Etsuato trading company may be their doing."

"……What do you mean?"

The prince's voice was fraught with tension and worry as he questioned Setorion.

"To be honest, I received a report that the elves Diento had secretly been keeping disappeared after the assassination. Lord Hoban previously purchased an elf of his own. Although nothing has been confirmed, the same thing might have happened in Hoban……"

Setorion remained perfectly claim as he voiced his suspicions.

"Are you saying that the elves are pulling the strings behind the scenes? That's a terrible thought…… but I doubt they can get into the palace in the first place."

"However, things would be troubling if they have someone guiding them inside…… Diento was a fort in it's own right, but you've already seen the results. If we assume that the uproar in the town is a feint, then there is the possibility that someone people are being lead here to take your life."

"……What should we do?"

"It'd be best if you hide in an unknown location. We should head to your secret mansion in the first district. Your Highness."

Douglass hesitated for a moment before offering a small nod, Setorion proceeded to give an order to the messenger waiting outside the room.

“Prepare a carriage for his highness at the back entrance. Hurry.”

When they received a quiet confirmation, Douglass and a small group of imperial guards made their way to the back entrance.

Since only members of the royal family and their close relatives knew of the passage, only the sound of the groups’ footsteps could be heard in the nearly empty hall.

Despite sneaking around in the at night without a lamp, the group soon arrived at the back entrance where a small black carriage with the royal family’s crest on it was prepared.

In front of the carriage were four guards on horseback.

Setorion opened the carriage door and allowed Douglass to enter before entering it himself.

Once the two were inside the sound of a whip was heard and the carriage was soon on it’s way to the rear gate.

The soldiers stationed at the gate simply allowed the carriage to pass when they saw the crest that adorned it.

The black carriage raced across the stone pavement of the first district’s residential area.

The atmosphere inside the carriage was rather heavy as only the jostling of the carriage and the hoof beats could be heard.

Suddenly the horses started neighing and the carriage came to a stop, causing Douglass to lost his balance and fall over.

“What was that?!”

Instead of a reply, the sounds of the guards charging at something and the start of an intense battle was heard outside.

“Setorion! What’s happening?!”

Douglass peered out the window and looked out at the dark streets, but could only make out moving silhouette.

“Please calm down your highness. There is nothing to worry about.

Setorion unsheathed his decorative sword that hung at his waist and stabbed prince Douglass in the chest as he said that.

As he looked down at the silver sword inside his chest and back to Setorion, the prince’s eyes were full of confusion.

"……Y-You……?"

His words were cut short as his head drooped and blood started to spill from his mouth.

As if waiting for that moment, the carriage door opened and one person entered.

Setorion quickly pulled his sword out of Douglass's chest and sheathed it before kneeling in front of the person that entered.

"Things seem to be going according to plan…… though there was some trouble."

The person who had entered was tall, had light brown hair and handsome features, and he was showing a thin smile as he expressed his thanks to the kneeling Setorion.

“Your praise is wasted on me.”

Setorion looked up as the country’s first prince, Sect Rondaro Carunon Rhoden, took a seat.

“Despite this being an improvised plan, it was wonderfully executed.”

“No, I simply grasped the opportunity presented by the beastmen crawling into the city. If there’s anyone deserving the praise, it’s the Etsuato company that reported their troubles.”

“Good work. Still, it is quite fortuitous that the spark we sowed in Hoban managed to reach even this place.”

Prince Sect handsome features were distorted as he laughed maniacally.

“Yes. The force sent to deal with Juliana should be returning soon. The dealings with the representative have also been complete.”

“I’ve been aware of the situation with Juliana for a while now. However, most of the group sent to deal with her was wiped out by a monster attack……”

The prince simply shrugged his shoulder as he said that.

“I understand that my trip to Hoban will be delayed due to the monsters but apart from that there’s no real damage……”

“Well, at least that obscene bishop’s group was successful. ……Princess Juliana’s memento arrive a little while ago. Once this affair with Douglass here is settled we will announce her passing to the public.”

Prince Sect let out a sigh before looking at the loyal retainer kneeling before him before muttering in a low tone.

“Afterward, it’s Marudoira…… Such a shame to have to undermine the hard work of one’s own parents.”

“Father is already an old man. Is it not one’s filial duty to take over for the parent once their time has passed…”

Setorion nodded at Sect’s words before calmly offering his reply.

“Is that so—, I take it that the necessary preparations are complete?”

“Yes.”

When the two’s eyes caught one another, Prince Sect prompted Setorion with a nod, who proceeded to draw his sword yet again.

“Should I refrain from making it too deep? That said, it would be difficult for me to not hold back.”

Accepting the difficult order from Sect, Setorion nodded once before stabbing his sword into the prince’s left arm in one stroke.

“Gaaah!”

The prince a short pain-filled shout.

The sleeve of Sect shirt was torn and blood sprayed in a flashy manner, making the injury appear rather serious.

Once Setorion confirmed his handiwork he quickly sheathed his sword and offered it to the

prince.

“Your highness, please report to the temple of healing as this affair is settled.”

Sect received the sword and nodded as sweat streamed down his face.

Setorion quickly stepped off the carriage and instructed the driver to head towards the nearest temple.

Soon the sound of a whip cracked in the dark of the night as the black carriage ran towards the temple at full speed.

For a moment, Setorion looked back at the disappearing carriage before glancing at his subordinate knights, then at the sky in the direction of their destination.

“To the Etsuato company, quickly.”

Setorion’s low voice increased the knight’s tension.

Chapter 20:「Raid on the Etsuato company」Part 1

The Etsuato trading company was located in the capital's third district.

As the largest slave dealer in the capital, it's main building was built near the wall of the second district and appeared to be frequented by many wealthy visitors.

Slavery has had a variety of origins in human history, from criminals being reduced to that status, people selling themselves or others into slavery, to people taken as prisoners of war.

In the case of this world, the majority of the slaves are one-sidedly kidnapped from beastmen villages by human mercenaries and then sold into slavery.

Those that called themselves the People of the Mountains and Plains are human-like beings with the ears and tails of animals, and they are known to have greater physical strength than humans. Because of that reason the race faced rejection and seclusion.

Due to the People of the Mountains and Plains' high physical strength, there was a high demand for them so they could be used in mining operations.

Since this is the center of Rhoden Kingdom, many of the slaves were brought to the multiple slave merchants to be sold to the nobles and wealthy.

And the most influential company of them all was the Etsuato company.

A tall fence surrounded the company's building and the main gate had been reinforced with iron bolts that caused it to stand out from the surrounding shops.

However, the sturdy gate wasn't even a shadow of what it had been previously, because right now it was reduced to a pile of rubble that had been tossed aside.

The gate had indeed been sturdy, but since it's size and thickness weren't built to withstand a siege weapon, it was disappointingly easy to destroy when my body slammed into it.

The gate in Hoban might have been somewhat stronger.

When I destroyed the gate, Chiome wasn't surprised at all and simply said that her companion Goemon could have done the same.

Once we passed the destroyed gate we immediately began to search the building.

Night had already descended and things weren't going so well as the only light sources in the building were a few magic tool lamps.

The building was four stories tall and had a large courtyard in front of it.

Up 'til now, we've only found locked up human slaves, and nary a hint of the enslaved People of the Mountain and Plains.

This operation was supposed to be a decoy, so we decided to free the human slaves.

During our break in, I had defeated a high-spirited guard and swiped a large key ring from his waist.

I tossed the keys at the feet of one of the slaves and then bent the cell's bars so that a single person could pass through at a time. The slaves that saw this backed away in fear. Once we stepped away from the cage, they began to scramble for the key ring before all of them crawled out of the cell.

However, when the crawling slaves looked up, they all started to scream and ran out of the building as fast as they could.

I couldn't really blame them for that.

What they saw was a person wearing a gray cloak whose eyes were hidden within the depths of their hood. This was none other than the dark elf Ariane, who wore a mask to complete her ensemble.

The kumadori-like patterns engraved into the mask and the eeriness brought on by the dim lighting gave her the appearance of a wicked shaman.

I wasn't any different with my black cloak and the demonic looking helmet that was covered in decorative bird feathers.

In preparation for the raid, we found a street vendor that sold art pieces and bought the masks we were now wearing.

With these, the chances of our true identities being revealed were now only a one-to-ten-thousand chance.

To be honest, our appearance was only a superficial excuse because there isn't anyone who wouldn't be scared of a person that can bend metal bars with their bare hands.

But… Chiome wasn't the target of much fear since her full-body ninja garbs allowed her to blend into the shadows of the dark building.

Whenever a small amount of light penetrated the darkness I would catch a glimpse of Chiome in the corner of my eye, as she lurked in the shadows and cut down another slave trader.

Chiome was a cat person, so she had night vision like Ariane, and combined with her quick body it was unlikely that human eyes would be able to keep track of her in the darkness.

As I continued to admire her abilities while we searched, Chiome seemed to become slightly prideful.

"The first clan head was quoted as saying that the members of the cat-people race were

supreme existences.”

Chiome repeated the first clan head’s words and out of that auditory hallucination I came up with “The best of all animal-eared people! Cat ears are the strongest!”

After driving away the hallucination I asked about something that had started to bother me.

“Was the first head a cat person as well?”

“No, the first had been human. The first was a spy for the Leburan empire and when he saw the mistreatment of the cat people in the empire he protected them and eventually made them his subordinates. That is how the present Blade Heart Clan was founded.”

“Hoo, so you didn’t remain part of the empire?”

“Correct. The first generation were excellent spies and they accumulated so many achievements that people started to fear the first head’s power. As his exploits grew, the first head was targeted for assassination many times, yet he was able to skillfully overcome all the attempts.”

Chiome eyes narrowed as she continued to tell the story.

It’s inevitable that a person with great power would be the target of fear. Moreover, as a human surrounded by cat people instead of other humans, he would be meet with even greater suspicions and alienation.

“After that, the Emperor fell from power and the struggle for the throne began, so the first head went into hiding as the various factions fought it out. A large-scale civil war soon broke out and the first head used the confusion to lead the clan out of the empire.”

If I’m not mistaken, the Leburan Empires were large countries to the north of Rhoden. Could the reason that the Empire is divided even to this day be the result of the first head’s actions……?

When her story was finished Ariane spoke up.

“Chiome-chan these cells are full of People of the Plains and Mountains.”

It was as she said, the passage we were now in was lined with cells full of people with various figures.

There were cat people like Chiome, wolf-eared people, and people with long rabbit ears that were a little similar to elven ears.

Since the People of the Plains and Mountains lack the high magic-power of the elves, they weren’t bound with the magic eating collars.

Instead, every single one of them was chained to the wall with shackles and fetters made of heavy iron in order to restrict the movements of their high-spec bodies.

After a cursory glance of the cells, I could only internally sigh at the number of people that had to be freed.

When I stepped forward to help, everyone looked upon me with wariness before retreating as far back as they could in the cell.

Again, it was an understandable reaction because anyone would be wary of a duo wearing strange masks and black and gray cloaks respectively.

Some of the cells had young children inside them that started to cry when they saw us. Several scowling young men even stood in front of the children in an attempt to protect them.

We somehow have assumed the role of the villains.

It was at this moment that a group of bodyguards and slave traders suddenly appeared from somewhere deeper inside the building, running towards our current position.

“I am Chiome of the Blade Heart Clan and I’ve come to help you! Listen to Arc-dono’s instructions when they are given!”

Chiome told the people in the cell that as she brandished her dagger and charged at the approaching group.

The people in the cells suddenly stirred at Chiome’s statement.

“Hey, did you just say the Jin Shin Clan?!”

“Is that true?! Who are those weird people?!”

I saw the caution in their eyes turn into a small ray of hope. The Blade Heart Clan was apparently well known.

While Chiome rushed the bodyguards and slave dealers, I began to do my part of this raid.

First, let’s destroy these cells.

I went about distorting the iron bars of the cells with my bare hands to make a traversable opening. I bent the bars to the point where the opening was the large enough that even I could pass through it.

Those watching in the cell gasped in surprise and admiration.

Next, would be the removal of the shackles and fetters, but I didn’t find a set of keys to unlock them like with the humans.

Since there was no other option, I drew my sword from under my cloak to cut the chains, and everyone obviously shrank back when I held up my sword.

“I need to cut the chains of the strongest people first.”

My voice was muffled by the mask and that caused the people to hesitate.

“Kyun!”

Suddenly Ponta popped up from beneath my cloak in front of everybody.

Before the raid, Ponta had been planted atop my head as usual, but in combination with the mask she would’ve attracted even more attention, and that’s why she had been wrapped around my neck until now.

It must have been stuffy under everything so she came up for fresh air.

The appearance fluffy fox around the neck of a strange masked figure caused the people to stare as such an indescribable sight.

They all fell silent and it looked like nobody in the cells knew what to do in this situation.

Sounds of an intense battle was heard as Chiome clashed with the bodyguards from the depths.

“Hurry up, their reinforcements will be arriving soon!”

After hearing Ariane’s shout and seeing things unfolding, one man took a step forward.

The man had ears similar to Chiome’s, but their size and coloring were like those of a tiger or leopard rather than a cat’s.

Despite his large size, the man timidly held up his shackled hands.

When I slashed at the chains of the shackles they were cut without any resistance and the man could freely move his arms again.

“Sorry. You’re here to save us after all.”

“Yes.”

The leopard man was a little teary eyed as I chimed in while cutting the chains connecting the fetters.

“Please start cutting the chains of the others with this!”

When the leopard man could once again move freely, Chiome reappeared and handed him a large axe.

I saw that there was blood dripping from the axe’s handle, so it was probably a weapon taken from one of the dead bodyguards. When he received the axe, the leopard man started to slash the chains of his brethren.

However, he had to struggle since there was no way the iron chains could be cut easily with an ordinary axe.

As for me, there was no way a mythical grade weapon couldn't cut through the chains, so I quickly cut them off the slaves one after another.

Soon a group of guards in matching armor rushed in from the rear entrance.

"Don't let the slaves and thieves escape! If you can't capture them, kill them!"

The guard captain handed out instructions to his subordinates as they all drew their swords. A solitary shadow suddenly approached the group at a speed faster than the eye could follow.

『Water Style: Water Wolf Fang!!』

Chiome performed a hand sign similar to certain ninja manga as she charged at the guards, and suddenly three one-meter tall water wolves appeared around her and she commanded them to attack the guards.

Chapter 21:「Raid on the Etsuato company」Part 2

"What is that? Do they have a Magician!?"

The water wolves summoned by Chiome's ninjutsu evaded the sword swings of the guards and began to bite into their arms and legs, making them scream and roll on the floor in agony.

Occasionally a sword would hit one of the wolves, but the blade would pass right through it, making me think that normal swords couldn't affect them.

Ariane was about to jump into the fray but she stopped for a moment in order to analyze Chiome's movements.

Since her face was covered by the mask her expression couldn't be seen, but her astonishment easily came through.

However, the pause was only for a brief moment, immediately after that the two of them started to cut down one injured guard after another.

My heart was conflicted since I knew that these were just guards hired to keep the peace and arrest thieves.

But looking at the way humans treated the People of the Plains and Mountains, I couldn't help but question this ambiguous situation and the ever changing values of an era.

I shook those thoughts out of my head and focused on the present where I needed to do my job and free the slaves.

There were about twenty people in this cell and I just finished cutting the last of the chains.

However, there were still a significant number of people chained up in the other cells.

I opened up the next cell like the first one and start cutting chains one after another. The freed people took the initiative and started working on freeing the others.

Thanks to that the rate at which the slaves were freed increased.

The number of guards continued to increase, but as you'd expect from a race with high physical abilities, once they picked up the scattered weapons and joined Ariane and Chiome, the guards were instantly repelled.

Meanwhile, the number of people freed numbered almost seventy, and a considerable amount of them had joined the battle against the guards.

The number of guards coming here has increased and the building was already under siege.

Simply put, we were approaching the limits of this passageway and this situation was highly advantageous for the high-spec People of the Plains and Mountains.

Because of the indoor guerilla warfare the kingdom's army couldn't make use of their numerical advantage, but there was still a chance for them to grow impatient and level the entire building with a barrage of magic.

We could not afford to take things slow and steady.

Since others were now helping me free everyone, I made destroying the cages my top priority and moved deeper into the building.

Before long I came across a large gate with a group of guards glaring in my direction.

One of the larger guards was holding up two struggling children by their necks. The long rabbit ear and drooping dog ears made it clear that the little girls dressed in old rags weren't human.

"You! That's quite the fancy outfit you got there! Bastard do you think we don't know you're beastman from 'Emancipator!? It'd be a shame if something happened to these kids, right?"

"I am not part of Emancipator, I am Arc. Why don't you just let the children go?'

It was only after I introduced myself and requested the release of the children did I realized my mistake.

——Crap, despite going through the trouble of wearing a mask I just gave them my name.

Internally, I was tearing out my hair for my carelessness. The opposition took my silence as an indication that having the hostages was effective because the large man gave a vulgar smile as he tightened his hold on the girls' necks.

"Bwaha! Don't resist if you want them to live!! A good deal, right? Be sure to behave yourself!"

Spit flew from the man's mouth as he shouted while the other men started to smirk as they draw their weapons and gradually shrink their encirclement.

As the distance between myself and the other men shortened, the corners of the large man's mouth began to raise as he was assured of his victory.

The moment the men were about swing their weapons, I used【Dimensional Step】to transfer behind the large man.

I grasped the man's head with both hands and twisted with all my might.

There was a dull sound of bones breaking and the man was now making eye contact with me.

The man's eyes widened in surprise for a moment as the muscles beneath his neck gave out, his pants darkened with waste, and the children fell from his arms.

His body fell to the floor like a doll that had been smashed against the wall.

The girls freed from the chokehold coughed for a bit before they looked up at me in fright.

“Close your eyes for a bit. The scary men will be gone soon.”

“Kyun.”

I softly patted the heads of the two five or six-year-old girls, who had to see Ponta around my neck, before giving me a nod and covering their eyes with their hands while calmly sitting down on the spot.

“Shit! What did you do!?”

The men that had been smirking just a second ago as they surrounded me were now shaken and trying to figure out what happened.

I took advantage of their confusion and struck down the closest men.

I swung my fist with explosive force into the man’s face and chest, and the resulting sound of bones shattering caused the others to scream.

Not even ten seconds had passed before the heads and chests of the remaining men were all completely deformed.

I had thought that a battered corpse would have been better than a bloody one, but that doesn’t seem to be the case.

When I returned to the girls that had kept their eyes closed as promised, I whispered to avoid startling them.

“It’s alright, you can now open your eyes. The scary men are gone.”

Inside I was sneering at myself for saying that while wearing a feather decorated ogre mask, when I heard familiar voices from behind me.

“Arc, we’re finished over there. The next area should be the only place left, right?”

“Arc-dono, sorry for making you wait.”

The introduction of Ariane’s masked form frightened the girls, but when they saw their stealthily dressed, cat-eared brethren, they calmed down again.

“Once things are finished here we can escape with transfer magic.”

I spoke my confirmation while opening the large door that led to the last area of the building.

The nice looking furniture and the table surrounded by chairs gave the place the atmosphere

of a small, clean residence.

It must have been a conference room used for business negotiations.

While I looked around the room, the two little girls peeked through the door before entering the room.

Chiome entered after the two, followed by Ariane while I brought up the rear.

After opening another door, we followed a long passage when we started to smell something rancid.

The room at the end of the passage reeked of sweat and dried grass, and was filled with almost completely nude People of the Plains and Mountains chained to the wall.

Many of the women here had bulging stomachs that indicated a pregnancy and all of them were frightened the moment they saw me.

The girls ran up and tearfully embraced two different women that were both dressed in rags and had large stomachs.

This couldn't be anything but a breeding pen…

They were impregnating these women to sell the children as slaves… I doubted the practice would be very profitable, but judging by the scale of this company it's likely that this was a small, experimental farm.

There was no way to not feel nauseated after looking at this.

"Ariane-dono, could you please see if you can find them something to wear."

"……Yeah, I got it……"

When I called out to her, a speechless Ariane quickly left the room in search of something to dress these poor women in.

Chiome frowned and had to close her eyes and calm herself down before she started to speak in her usual, monotonous voice

"I know how to pick locks, let's hurry up and get away from this place…."

"Alright."

Chiome kneeled down in front of one of the women's fetters before taking out a set of small metal tools from her breast pocket. After fiddling with the keyhole for a moment, the fetters came off with a 'Gachari' sound.

Following her example, I cut the chains of a nearby dog-eared man with my sword. Since it was difficult to use a two-handed sword in such a situation, I was thinking about getting a

sharp dagger.

Ariane finally returned after everyone's hands and feet had been freed.

"There weren't many clothes, so we'll have to make do with these."

She was holding out a bundle of cloth in her hands.

A closer look at the larger pieces of cloth revealed that they were actually bed sheets and curtains. I suppose that wearing these was better than nothing.

I took a few and started handing them out along with Ariane.

"Arc-dono, let's move these people first."

"Fine, let's used the hall from before as our base of operations."

Following my reply, Chiome started to lead the people to the hall we passed through.

The people started to stir and question what was going to happen as I stood at the center of the room and invoked the spell, pouring in more mana than usual.

"【Transfer Gate】"

Once the magic was invoked, a larger than normal magic formation spread out across the hall's floor and illuminated the whole room.

The gathered people went stiff and the animal ears atop their heads stood up in attention.

Things went dark for one moment and in the next moment the petrified people were standing in a plain illuminated by moonlight.

The wind carried the sounds of insects as it blew across the surrounding grass. Visible in the distant south was the royal capital Olav.

After we bought the masks from the street vendor we had come here to perform a preliminary inspection of a possible transfer destination. Though I couldn't see the entire capital like I did during the daytime, it still had more street lights than other cities.

When people started to understand the situation, some began to cry tears of joy while others asked Chiome for an explanation.

Space opened up around us since no one wanted to approach the two cloaked figures that wore strange masks.

Or that's what I thought until the rabbit-eared girl I saved and the women that seemed to be her mother walked up to me with tears in their eyes and half sobbed "Thank you" while bowing in front of me.

“Uhmmm, as long as you take care of your daughter……”

As I nodded and responded to her thanks, I noticed a group of people approaching from the shadows.

Although I couldn’t make them out all that well in the moonlight, they were dressed in ninja garbs similar to Chiome’s and they all had cat ears atop their heads.

Chiome went over to have a long talk with the new group before she turned and began to speaking to everyone in her usual monotone voice.

“These people will lead you to a safe location. Follow the instructions they give.”

After speaking amongst themselves for a bit, the freed people began following Chiome’s cat ninja companions.

“Leave things to them. Let’s return and free the others.”

“Alright. Let’s go!”

The magic formation of【Transfer Gate】lit up and I set the hall back at the Etsuato company as the destination.

The moment we returned to the hall we found ourselves surrounded by weapon-wielding People of the Plains and Mountains that were staring at us in surprise.

“Huh!? Who!?”

They were all surprised when three people suddenly appeared out of nowhere, but they calmed down when they realized that we were the same people that had freed them.

“Sorry, we didn’t realize it was you all. ……You wouldn’t happen to know what happened to our brethren that were imprisoned in this area?”

One middle-aged looking man with dog ears stepped forward as the group’s representative and asked for the whereabouts of the others.

“They have already been moved out of the building. My companions are already taking them to a hidden location.”

Chiome moved down her face mask before offering a brief explanation. The surrounding people sighed in relief once they heard her answer.

“How goes the rescue operation and the battle against the guards?”

“Everyone is out of the cells, but half of them are still in chains. The guards have fortified their cordon around the building but only attack sporadically.

The dog-eared man gave Chiome a report of the situation.

She lightly nodded at the report before prompting me with a look.

I nodded to her before invoking【Transfer Gate】once again.

After leaving the new group with Chiome's companions, we immediately went back and returned to the passage with all of the cells.

A number of people hung around the cell and were in the middle of getting the fetters off the remaining people while others were fighting off the guards that occasionally attacked.

The People of the Mountains and Plains were basically the only ones left, since all the human slave traders and guards had been almost completely wiped out. A couple of guards would occasionally launch an attack, but every time the fight started to turn into a match of endurance they would immediately retreat.

Since there wasn't a lot of time left we began to gather the clamoring people into groups and taking them to the grass plain with【Transfer Gate】.

When we had finished making all the round trips, more than a hundred People of the Plains and Mountains had been freed from the Etsuato company building.

They had all been confused and surprised by the situation, but once they realized that【Transfer Gate】had taken them away from their prison to this grassy plain, one after another started to bow their heads towards me.

The only real problem was that some pieces of the destroyed cells and chains came along with everyone, which ruined the atmosphere.

"Everything has gone according to plan."

Ariane muttered that as she removed her mask and lowered her hood as she stared back at the capital.

Pushing that thought into the back of my mind I nodded and said.

"I'll go finish the job then."

I used【Transfer Gate】and returned to the Etsuato company alone.

There were no other people inside the company's building, and everything was covered by an eerie atmosphere because of the silence.

After making sure that not even a shadow of a living person was left inside I invoked a magic spell.

"【Stone Fangs】!"

When the intermediate level spell activated, stone spikes started to pierce the building from the ground, easily passing through the second floor at a sharp angle.

As all this was happening, the sound of the rumbling floor and the creaking building started to rock the area.

As a finishing blow, I began to fire【Rock Bullet】at the support pillars on the opposite side of the yard. When the dust settled, the pillars looked as if they were blown away with a howitzer. The sound of creaking started to get louder as the building could no longer support it's own weight thus was on the verge of collapse.

It wasn't long before the building started to collapse in on itself like a chain of dominoes.

Witnessing the events unfolding till the end, I invoked【Transfer Gate】for the last time and returned to the grassy field.

Chiome called out to me while I was brushing off the dust from the collapsing building.

"Arc-dono, thank you for aid in this matter."

Several of Chiome's ninja companions turned in my direction and started to rise. Among them was a figure that I recognized.

He was dressed in similar ninja garb as Chiome and had triangular ears atop his head. He was two meters and thirty centimeters tall and had a body packed with steel-like muscle, he also projected the same atmosphere as the conqueror of century's end.

This could be no one other than the turban wearing man I had seen in the capital earlier today.

Chiome introduced him as Goemon, one of the Blade Heart Clan's six best ninjas.

I could totally believe that he could have destroyed a building's gate with a single punch.

The man named Goemon held out his rough hand and silently demanded a handshake. I merely nodded and accepted the handshake, after which he began to flex his right bicep.

I didn't understand the meaning but when I assumed a flexing pose he nodded in satisfaction before walking away.

I unmasked before giving Ariane a questioning glance, but she simply shook her head in response.

Without minding the atmosphere, Chiome continued to offer her thanks in a light tone.

"Ariane-dono, Arc-dono we can't thank you enough for the help you provided this time."

"This job helped us furthering our own agenda, so we didn't mind."

"As long as we could lend a hand. Where will you go from here?"

Our response was natural since we only helped Chiome for the information we needed.

Chiome looked up at a mountain range that laid in the horizon.

“I will be heading to the hidden village located in the Calcutta mountain range.”

“Havn’t your brethren built a large country on the southern continent?”

Ariane suddenly approached Chiome with a question about a country on a whole other continent.

The only change in Chiome’s express was a lowering of her eyebrows.

“Yes. However, it’s difficult to cross the sea with a great number of people and the climate here is acceptable for our people.’

As the group of freed slaves began their trek to the Calcutta mountain range, their numbers quickly swelled beyond two hundred.

Those simultaneously rescued from the other locations were meeting up here.

Considering the number of people heading to live in the hidden village and their limited means of transportation, there’s no doubt that they would be targeted by mercenaries sent out to reclaim the slaves.

“It would be acceptable for you to know the location but……”

“?”

Chiome thought aloud as she stared at them before she uneasily shook her head and looked back at me.

“No. More importantly, you two should receive your reward.”

Chiome straightened up before changing the topic.

Ariane and I looked directly into Chiome’s eyes when she said that.

“Drusus De Barishimon, the person that you two are looking for, is a viscount of the Holy Leburan Empire.”

The sound of the blowing wind became louder as it runs across the grassy plains and caused my cloak to greatly flutter.

……It seems that this tale wouldn’t just end in the Rhoden Kingdom.

Epilogue

The Rinburuto Arch dukedom was located southeast of the Rhoden Kingdom.

It was originally a territory of the Rhoden Kingdom, but during the war with the elves six hundred years ago, Duke Tishiento and his family advocated peace with the elves and broke off from the kingdom and formed the Arch dukedom.

Back then, the Kingdom harbored no goodwill towards Rinburuto but after losing the war against the elves, Rhoden wasn't in any position to challenge Rinburuto over the matter.

Since the Tishiento family has promoted harmony with the elves since the founding of the Rinburuto Arch dukedom, the Dukedom became the only human trading partner of the elves.

The performance of elvisn magic tools was superior to those of human origin, and for that reason they were very sought after.

Rhoden Kingdom originally started the war against the elves because they desired their magic tools and knowledge, but the war ended with the overwhelming victory of the outnumbered elves of Great Canada Forest against Rhoden Kingdom, which had been the continent's second largest country back then.

The other foreign countries that had wanted the elves' technology were surprised at the result and abandoned their plans of attacking the Elves, trying to shift their focus towards trade negotiations instead.

However, the elves withdrew into the Great Canada Forest and the only country they would trade with was the Rinburuto Arch dukedom. As a result, Rinburuto held the monopoly on elven magic tools, allowing such a small country to rapidly raise in power.

Currently in Rinburuto's capital, an enormous harbor was built along the gulf of Arudoria that housed ships from all over the northern continent. Adjacent to this magnificent harbor was a sprawling city.

Naturally, the population here was higher than Rhoden Kingdom's capital city. Merchants came from all over the world to buy elven magic tools, resulting in a booming sea trade that surpassed both of the Empires. Even the elves, who had long ago disappeared from other countries, could be seen walking the city's streets.

Said streets were unusually active today as more than a hundred of the nation's soldiers were leading a black carriage, in the middle of a military formation, straight to Rinburuto's palace.

The one inside the carriage was none other than the second princess of the Rhoden Kingdom, Juliana Marill Melissa Rhoden Olav.

Her long, dark blonde hair that hung in loose waves from her head, only complemented her beautiful brown eyes and lovely features.

She was viewing the lively cityscape from the carriage window as it slowly passing by her eyes.

Ten days had passed since the attack in the forest at the base of the Annette mountains.

After leaving the area of the attack, her party had been on high alert as they avoided the main roads and were somehow able to cross the section of the Riburuto river that separated the Kingdom and the Dukedom.

Immediately after entering the Rinburuto Arch Dukedom, they proceeded to Marquis Vibrato's castle and asked him for protection.

The thirty guards that had survived the attack had been exhausted by the time they reached Riburuto.

Miraculously, there was nary a wound to be found from the attack, but the lost horses, their wariness against pursuers, and minimal number of rest had caused a remarkable amount of fatigue to accumulate.

After thanking Marquis Vibrato for allowing them to stay in his castle, Juliana sent a messenger to Lady Serena in Rinburuto's capital.

The messenger returned almost immediately, along with the soldiers, on the third day of her stay with Marquis Vibrato.

It was under the protection of the Arch dukedom's national army that Juliana was escorted to the capital from Vibrato's domain.

Before long, Juliana's carriage approached the large stone bridge that lead to the Archduke's palace at the center of the Rinburuto.

A large moat had been dug around the palace and filled with seawater. The bridge crossing the moat was surrounded by a crowd of people with fishing lines extending towards the water, creating a peaceful scenery.

After crossing the moat, the carriage passed the castle ramparts and the white walls of the palace from which the Rinburuto Arch dukedom was ruled became visible. A multitude of elegantly decorated/carved spires gave the palace a solemn atmosphere, displaying the country's power and abundant wealth.

"The beauty of this place hasn't changed at all……"

Feruna's comment broke the princess's chain of thought and made her look up.

Princess Juliana silently nodded in agreement before turning towards the palace entrance.

What she saw was a line of guards standing in front of the palace's grand staircase. Standing behind the soldiers dressed in excellent body armor was a familiar face.

The carriage slowly advanced through the palace gardens and stopped just before the grand stairway.

The moment the driver opened the carriage door, princess Juliana jumped out and ran towards the familiar person.

“Melia-oneesama!”

“Maril, you’re safe!”

The person princess Juliana called Melia ran towards her and softly embraced her while tearfully addressing her by her childhood name.

Her hair was the same dark blonde shade as Juliana’s and neatly tied up while her brown eyes were filled with love. The women who embraced Juliana and was wearing a beautiful light blue dress was Juliana’s older sister that married into the Archduke’s family, Serena Melia De Olav Tishiento.

“All that matters is that you’re alive……

“I’m sorry I made you worry Meria-oneesama……”

Juliana’s eyes teared up as she heard her sister speak and she buried her face in her sister’s bosom.

“I fainted when I heard that you were struck down by Douglass in Rhoden……”

“Onee-sama, what in the world are you talking about?!”

When Juliana heard her sister’s comment she lifted her head and demanded an explanation.

“There seems to have been some chaos in Olav a little while ago. In the midst of that confusion, Douglass tried to kill Sect. Though Sect was injured, he managed to turn the tables and kill Douglass instead……”

“……Is that so. What of my supposed slaying?”

“When Douglass was defeated he was carrying the necklace mother gave you in his breast pocket. Major general Marudoira was implicated in Douglass’ actions and his execution was announced.”

Juliana looked down at her own chest as Serena spoke.

The memento from her mother was something she had always wore, but she had been unable to find it after the attack. Since they had to be on the lookout against pursuers, she had been forced to leave empty-handed with tears in her eyes.

It seems to have been stolen by the assailants so Juliana was outraged and relieved hearing it had been in Douglass’s hands, but feelings of doubt began to stir in her heart.

"……What's the situation with major general Marudoira?"

"Apparently, the chaos in the capital was his doing, but his son, general Setorion, swiftly stopped him."

Hearing the whole story Juliana turned around to hide her complicated feelings. However, her sister softly patted her head and quietly whispered gentle worlds in Juliana's ear that calmed her troubled heart.

"……You survived, that's all that matters to me."

The worries in her heart incredibly faded away as she buried her face into her kind older sister's chest.

* * *

Emperor POV

The Holy Leburan Empire was located in the northeastern region of the Northern continent.

In the center of the Empire's immense territory, situated on a large plain, was the capital city Habaren, which boasted a total population of 80,000 people. The city was built in a circular configuration where all the main roads lead to the elevated palace of the Emperor.

Siguenza, the palace at the center of the capital, was austere rather than elegant since it had originally been built as a fort back when the Leburan Empires had still been a single country

In the inner sanctum of Siguenza Palace was a room serving as the emperor's office.

Sitting in the chair reserved for the ruler of this country was a young man. His head was covered with red, slightly curly hair and he was dressed in a plain, military uniform.

This man was Domitianus Leburan Valetiafellbe, the young emperor of the Holy Leburan Empire.

He had been quietly leaning on his elbow and staring at the enlarged map of the empire when he heard a knock at the room's door.

"Enter."

Since there were no servants at all inside the room, and only a few specific people had permission to enter this room in the first place, the permission to enter was given in a rude tone.

When the door opened, a slightly overweight man dressed in flashier clothes than the emperor entered. His large stomach shook as he walked, a pitiful excuse for a mustache grew under his nose and his smiling face gave off a shady impression.

This person, dressed like what appeared to be a wealthy merchant, was Verumoasu Du Laizehl, the chancellor of the Holy Leburan Empire.

“What do you want Verumoasu?”

The emperor looked up at Verumoasu’s shady looking smile and immediately asked his question in a curt tone.

“Yes, your majesty. A short while ago I received a letter from our contact in Rhoden. It appears that first prince Sect has been declared as successor to the throne.”

“What did you say?!”

The emperor shouted in response to chancellor Verumaosu’s casual explanation.

Domitianus’ outburst was unbefitting of an emperor but he just glared at the smiling chancellor.

Normally, one would try to hide the fact that they were taking pleasure in the misery of someone who was receiving terrible news.

However, chancellor Verumoasu made no attempt to hide his ever broadening smile as he offered the emperor a large nod.

“Yes. It seems that prince Douglass attempted to eliminate princess Juliana and prince Sect. The result was the death of the princess and prince Sect turning the tables on Douglass and killing him.”

“What?! Why would that idiot Douglass carry out a plan like that?! This is the first time I’ve heard about this!”

Emperor Domitianus scowled as he cursed at the now deceased prince Douglass.

“They say Diento has been assassinated not too long ago. Is it possible that he grew impatient when the foundation of his faction was shaken?”

When the chancellor said that his belly shook in blatant amusement.

“The supplier of elves…… With Sect chosen as the next king, his ties with the west will strengthen and they’ll encroach on the southern front……”

Domitianus started to groan as he folded his arms and looked at the map in front of him.

“The monster tamer corps showed promising results when they were tested in the northern raids on Wetorias, right?”

“……That’s right. If the damage done by the monster tamer corps at Wetorias is any indication, then there would be no way an army can strike from the south. However, moving the monsters alone is certain to draw attention.”

Looking at the same map, chancellor Verumoasu answered and vagely pointed towards Wetorias, a fortress inside the Great Leburan Empire, while Domitianus' pondered over his next course of action.

"After the attack on Wetorias, there were reports of a "great harvest" of magic stone……"

"……It is as you say. I'll convey your instructions to the Magic Institute."

When the chancellor bowed to him, Emperor Domitianus suddenly noticed something and asked the shady man a question.

"That reminds me, what happened to Funoba?"

"He is currently traversing the area around the Fire Dragon mountains. A particular strong monster seems to be frequenting the area."

"I see, he is bound to receive more work once the monster tamer corps becomes more active. Tell the Magic Institute to increase the production of the『Ring of Submission』……"

When he finished speaking, emperor Domitianus gave a magnificent laugh

* * *

Silver and Namorax's Thoughts: Gonna try to keep it brief. This Volume wasn't bad but it wasn't the best either. The majority of the problems I have come from the pacing. The start was rather slow and once thing did pick up it didn't last long, then there certain thing just feel out of place. There's my opinion on the second prince and you can go back to read that, but there's also the fact that the Blade Heart Clan is only important for the last third despite their name being the volume title. I think I understand what the author was trying to do with this volume but the presentation was just handled poorly. Now what I did like was the character personalities and interactions. Arc isn't a Mary-sue in my eyes he's just thorough in and thoughtful of his actions. Ariane is passionate and impulsive. Chiome is pragmatic and skilled. There were some great thing in here, but for V3 the author needs to cut some stuff or expand on things further.

Namorax: (End of vol2)

Hi everyone, first time I wrote a comment about the story I helped translating/editing, so I apologise if my 5 cent are boring and/or rambling xD

What to say about Arc…the way he stumbles from one event to the next reminds me a bit of a teddybear… together with Ponta we have Papa Bear, Baby Bear… and Ariane could be… Mama Bear? Dunno where I wanted to go with this… *ahem*

In any case, I think the events in this chapter kinda indicate what will happen in the next volume. We definitely haven't seen the last of our princess, and I have the suspicion that Chiome will more or less become a member of Arc's party. To be honest, I don't know how I feel about that. I kinda like Chiome (or at least what little we have seen so far from her

outside battle), but whenever a “male” protagonist starts gathering nothing but women in his entourage I start to fear that the author drifts into the harem route. Still looking forward to see what Arc stumbles into next!

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